THE RESISTANCE UNIVERSE

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AWA

AWA

PRESENTS

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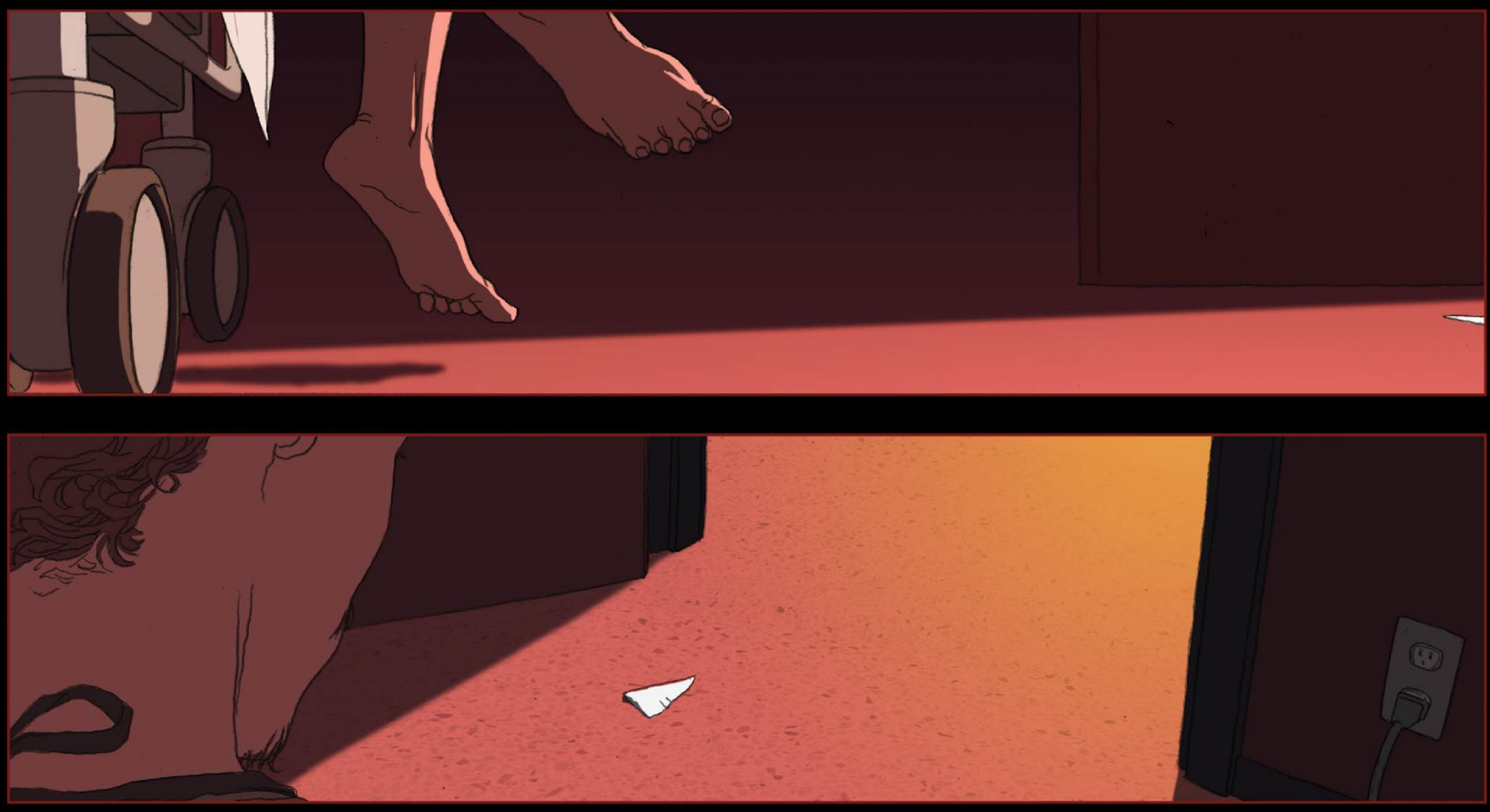
THEN..

HUHHHHH!

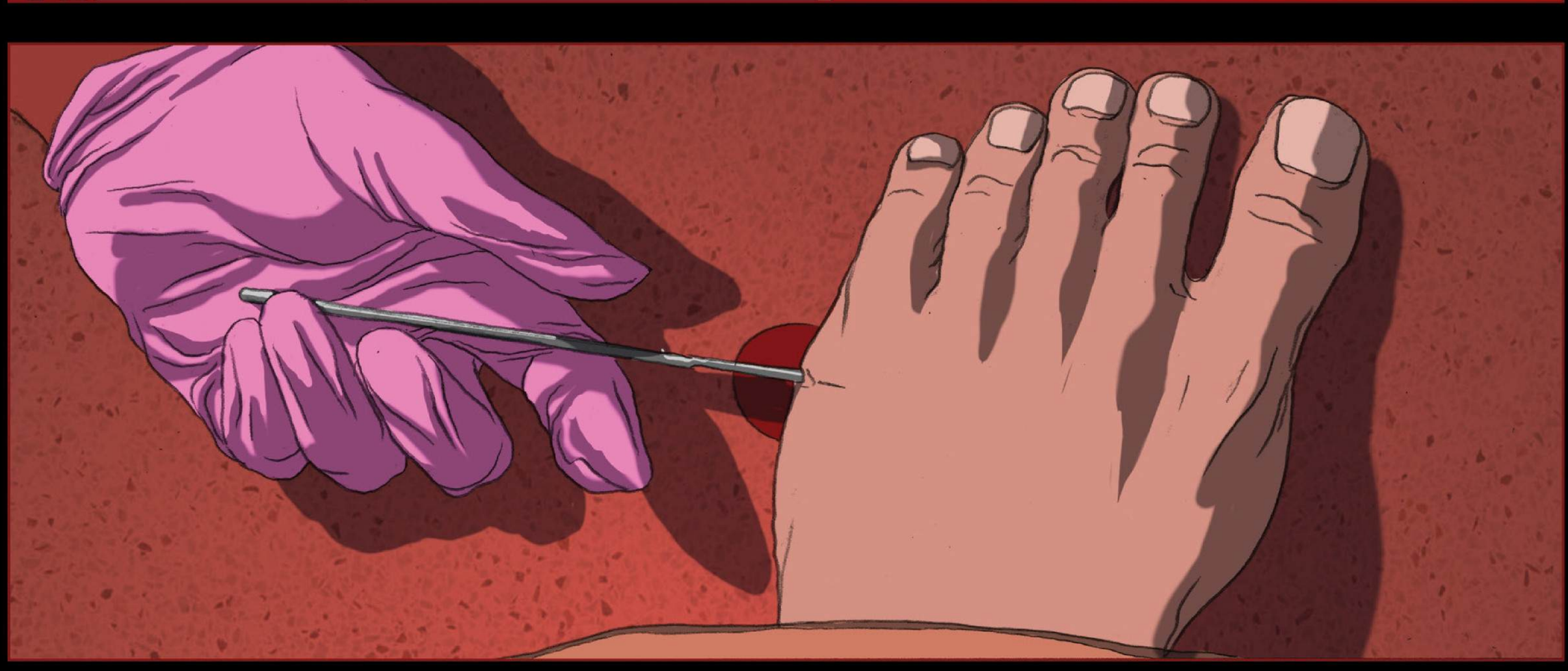
DELUSIONAL BEHAVIOR

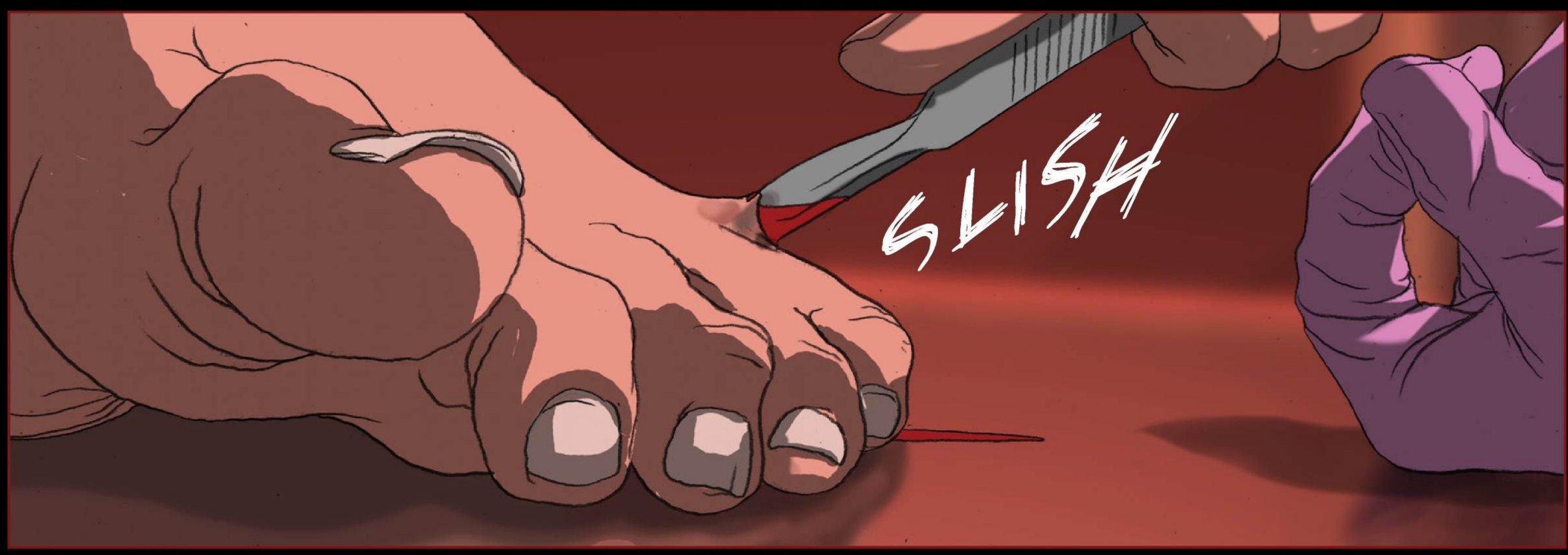


Patient Name:

SLASH

AH.




SLISH

IF YOU HAVE COURAGE, STEP FORTH, AND I SHALL TELL YOU WHO U ARE, WHAT U MUST DO, WHY I HAVE SPARED U--

--AND WHY. U. ARE.

NOW.

IT'S NOT OUR FAULT, AND THIS ISN'T OUR FIRST CHOICE.

WE TOLD YOUR BROTHER...DIDN'T WE, JOEY?

YEAH, WE TOLD HIM--

--HE NEEDED TO PAY BACK WHAT HE OWES MR. FIORELLI, PLUS THE VIG, OR WE WERE GONNA HAVE TO COME AFTER HIM.

OR SOMEONE CLOSE TO HIM.

AND UNFORTUNATELY, SHEILA, THAT WOULD BE YOU.

BECAUSE HE SKIPPED TOWN.

WELL, YEAH. BECAUSE THAT.

OTHERWISE WE WOULDN'T BOTHER YOU.

OF COURSE.

JUST SO YOU KNOW IT'S NOTHING PERSONAL.
WE'RE PROFESSIONALS. NO INSULT INTENDED.
NONE AT ALL.
NO, PLEASE... DON'T--
WE'LL MAKE THIS FAST AND PAINLESS.
OR AT LEAST FAST.
WE GOT A GUY WAITING IN THE CAR AND HE'S NOT REAL PATIENT.
SO DON'T MOVE.
SOMEONE, PLEASE HELP ME!
DON'T YOU FIND THIS SORT OF THING REALLY UNPRODUCTIVE?
YOU COULD BE OUT SEEING A MOVIE--
--HAVING DINNER--
--PROBABLY LEAVING A COMPLETELY INADEQUATE TIP--
--OR *ANYTHING* MORE SOUL-SATISFYING THAN THREATENING SOMEONE.

BECAUSE ONLY A BULLY THREATENS PEOPLE.

AND ONLY A *COWARD* THREATENS A WOMAN.

IT'S THE FREAK.

YEAH.

TOLD YOU HE WAS REAL.

POINT TAKEN.

I WANT YOU TO TAKE A *MESSAGE* BACK TO THE ONE YOU *SERVE*--

--THE *GREAT ENEMY*--

--TELL HIM AND HIS *COURT OF SHADOWS*--

--THAT I'M *COMING* FOR THEM.

AND NOT COINCIDENTALLY, FOR YOU.

AH.

CLICK-
CLICK-
CLICK

MY
TURN.

THEN.

--AND I JUST... I JUST NEED A LITTLE *HELP*, IS ALL.

THE PROBLEM IS, WE'VE ALREADY *DONE* EVERYTHING WE REALLY FEEL COMFORTABLE DOING, ISABELLE.

WE'VE *LOANED* YOU MONEY BEFORE BUT IT NEVER SEEMS TO DO ANY *GOOD*--

BUT IT'S MY MONEY--

DON'T BE SILLY, ISABELLE... YOUR FATHER GAVE THAT MONEY TO YOUR *UNCLE* TO LOOK AFTER BECAUSE HE KNEW YOU COULDN'T BE *TRUSTED* TO USE IT *WISELY*.

THAT'S NOT WHAT DADDY WANTED--

OUR ATTORNEY DISAGREES. IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO TAKE THIS TO *COURT*--

YOU KNOW I CAN'T AFFORD TO *DO* THAT--

THEN THERE'S REALLY NOTHING WE CAN DO.

IT'S YOUR OWN *FAULT*.

NEARLY EVERYONE *ELSE* WHO GOT SICK WITH THE *BIG DEATH* CAME OUT WITH *POWERS* THEY COULD USE TO MAKE MONEY. YOU'RE NOT EVEN A *MOTH*.

YOU DIDN'T GET POWERS.

YOU ONLY GOT *BETTER*.

YOU LET YOURSELF GET SICK BECAUSE YOU WERE *LAZY*. BECAUSE YOU DIDN'T TAKE *CARE* OF YOURSELF. SAME AS YOUR *FATHER*.

LAZY, BOTH OF YOU.

AND NOW YOU COME BACK TO US FOR HELP. AGAIN.

I DON'T HAVE ANYWHERE TO LIVE. I DON'T HAVE MONEY FOR RENT. I CAN'T GET A JOB BECAUSE THE GOVERNMENT THINKS I'M JUST *HIDING* MY POWERS SO I'M ON THE *NO HIRE* LIST.

IT'S EASY TO BLAME THE GOVERNMENT AND OTHER PEOPLE FOR OUR OWN MISTAKES, ISABELLE.

I DIDN'T MAKE A *MISTAKE.* I GOT *SICK* DURING A *PLANETARY PANDEMIC* AND I LOST MY *JOB* AND MY *FATHER* AND--

I HAVE TEN DOLLARS. THAT'S ALL. I'VE BEEN SLEEPING IN ABANDONED CARS AND EMPTY APARTMENTS. I DON'T KNOW WHAT I'M GOING TO DO. I CAN'T EVEN BUY FOOD BECAUSE I'M AFRAID I'LL NEED THAT TEN DOLLARS AND I'M SCARED, I'M JUST SCARED ALL THE TIME.

PLEASE HELP ME, UNCLE LIONEL. PLEASE.

I'M SORRY, ISABELLE. THERE'S NOTHING WE CAN DO. IT WOULD SET A BAD ***EXAMPLE*** AND JUST OPEN THE DOOR FOR YOU TO COME BACK AGAIN AND AGAIN AND...WELL, THAT'S NOT FAIR TO US, IS IT?

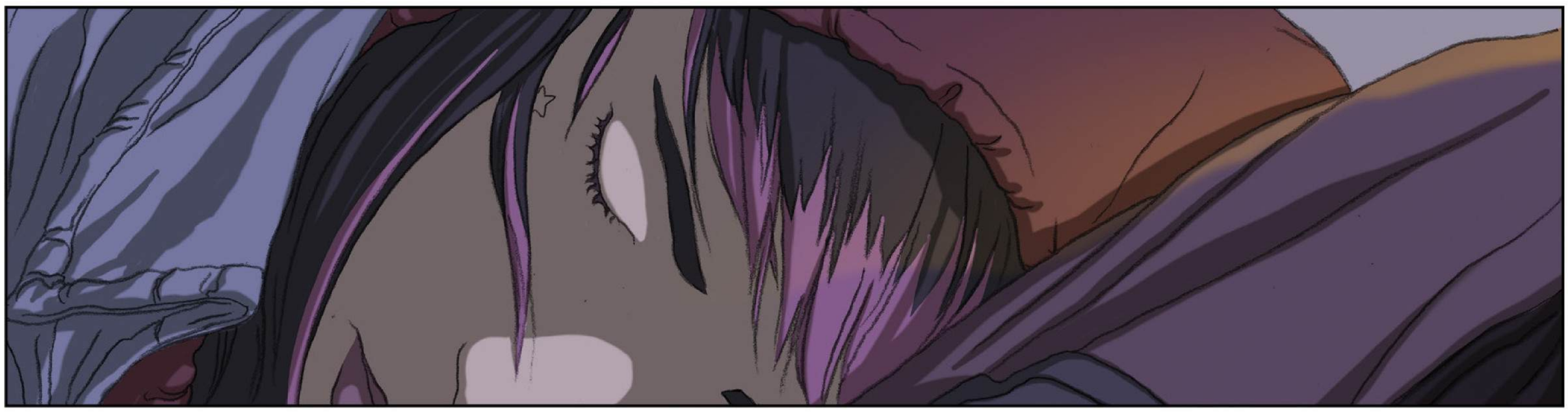
FINE...THEN I'LL JUST GO...

HEY, IF YOU NEED TO EARN SOME MONEY, I'LL BET YOU CAN THINK OF ***SOMETHING*** YOU CAN SELL.

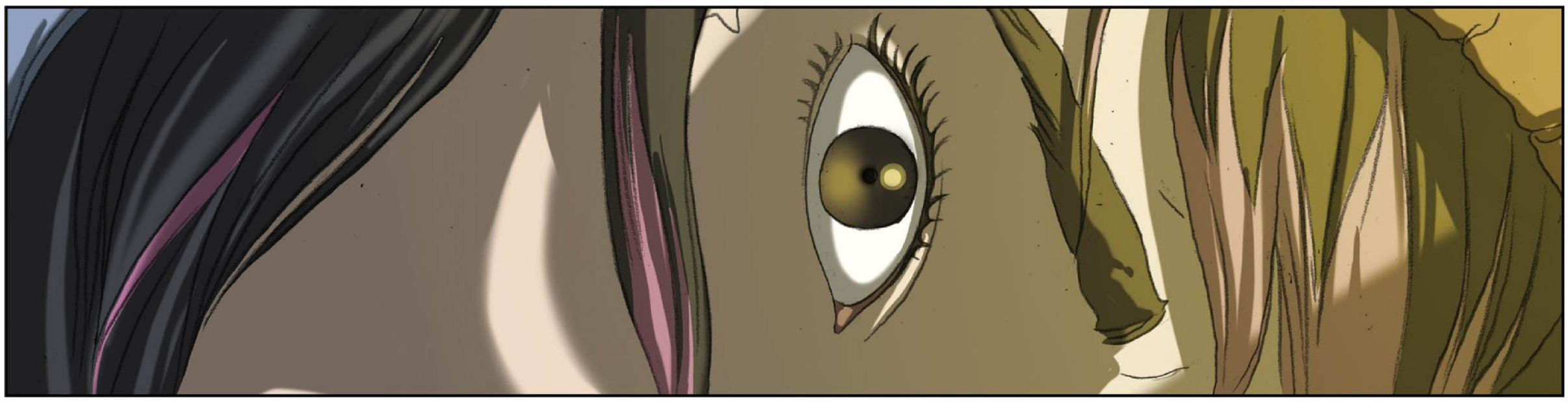
LOSER.

now.

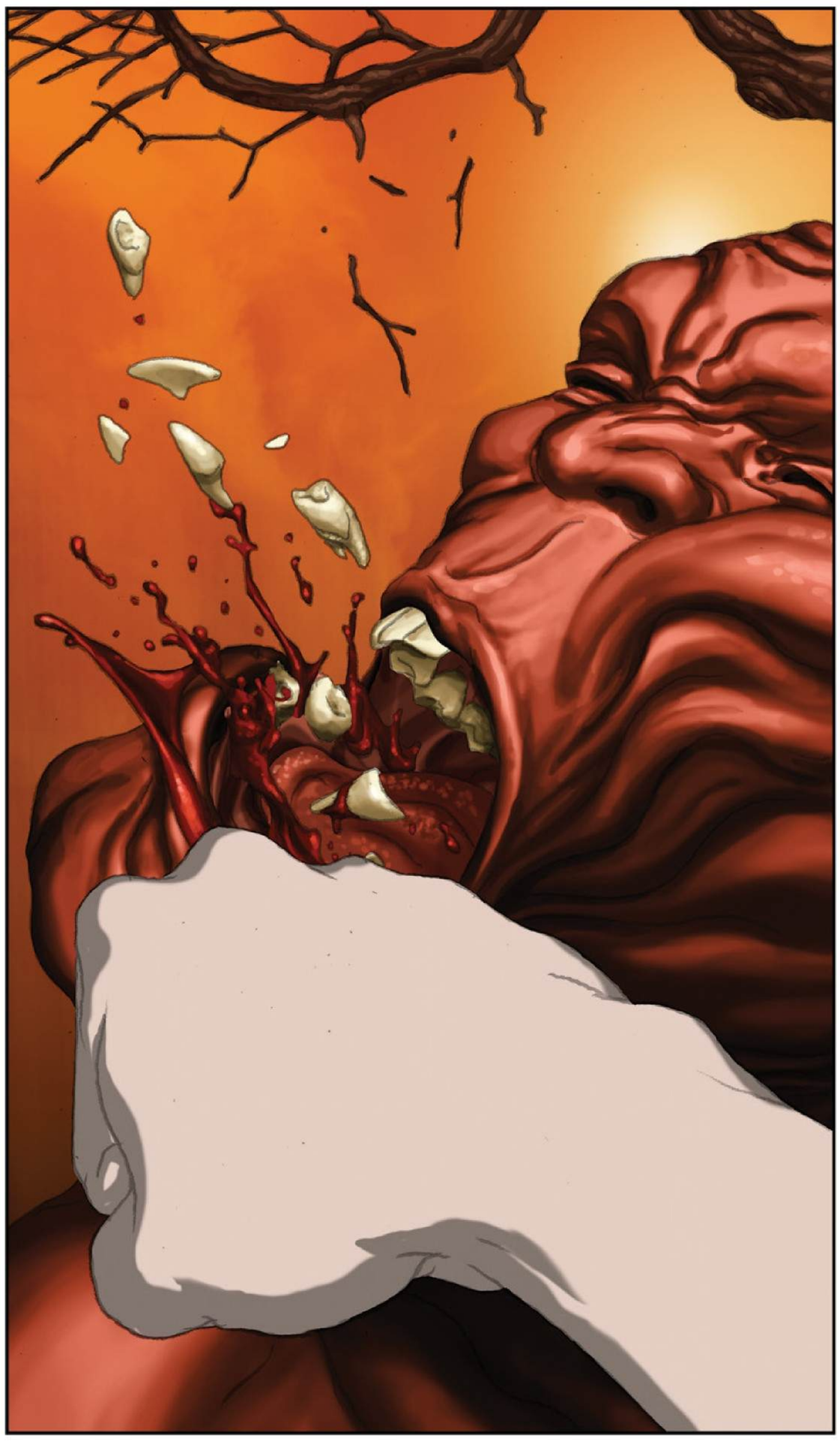
HELP WANT
WASHER

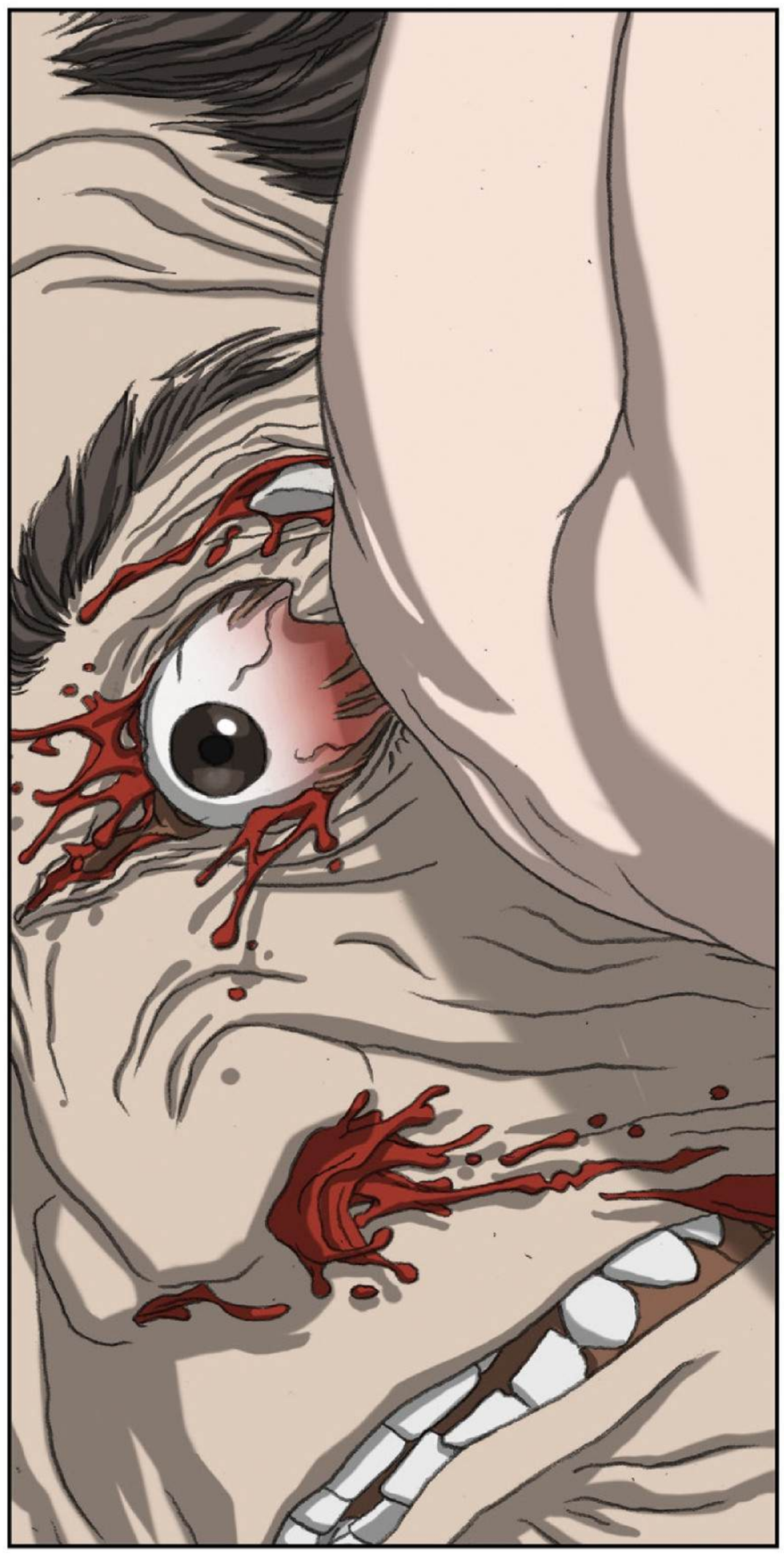


...CLICK...
CLICK-CLICK...



CRASH



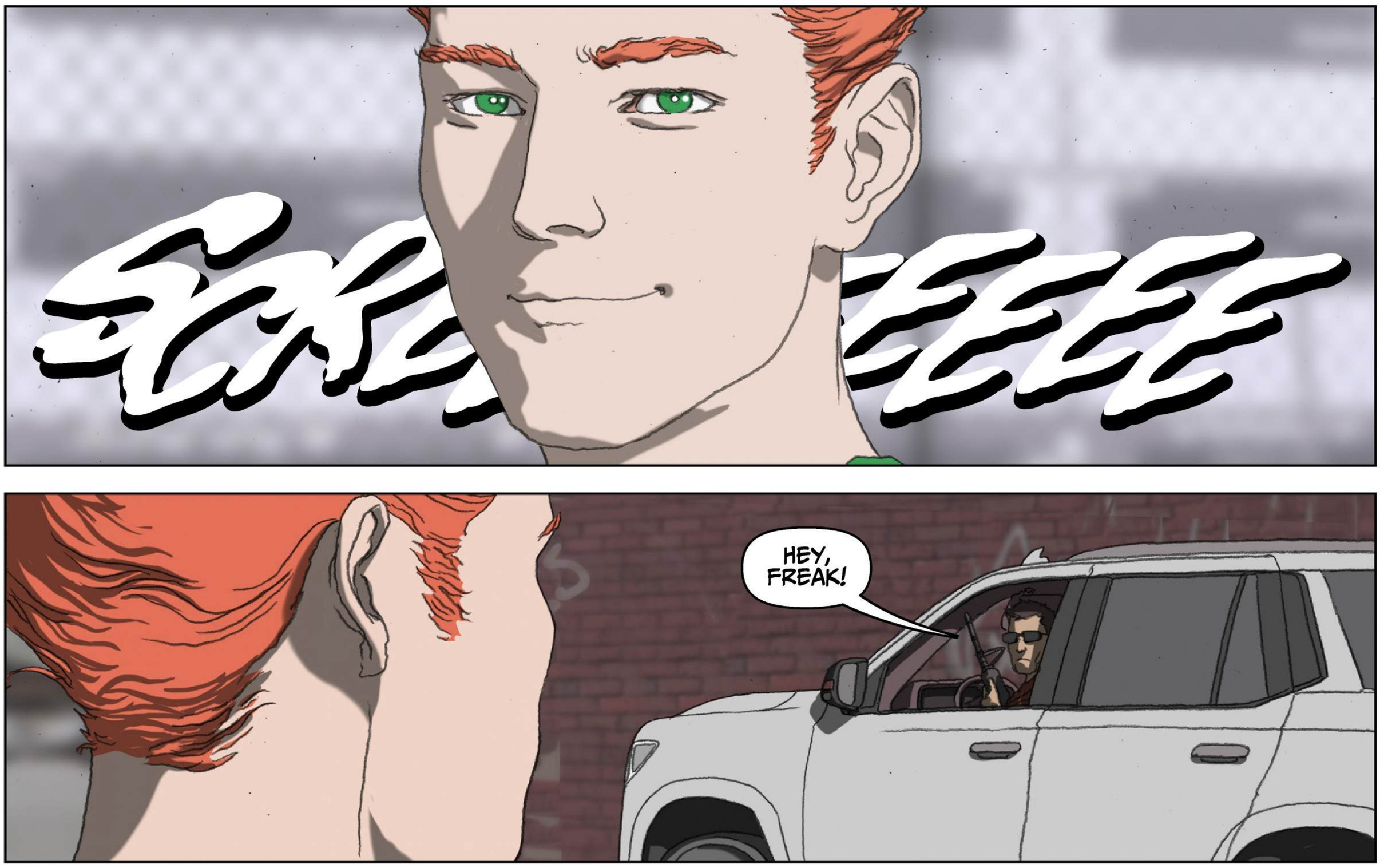


DO YOU HAVE MONEY?

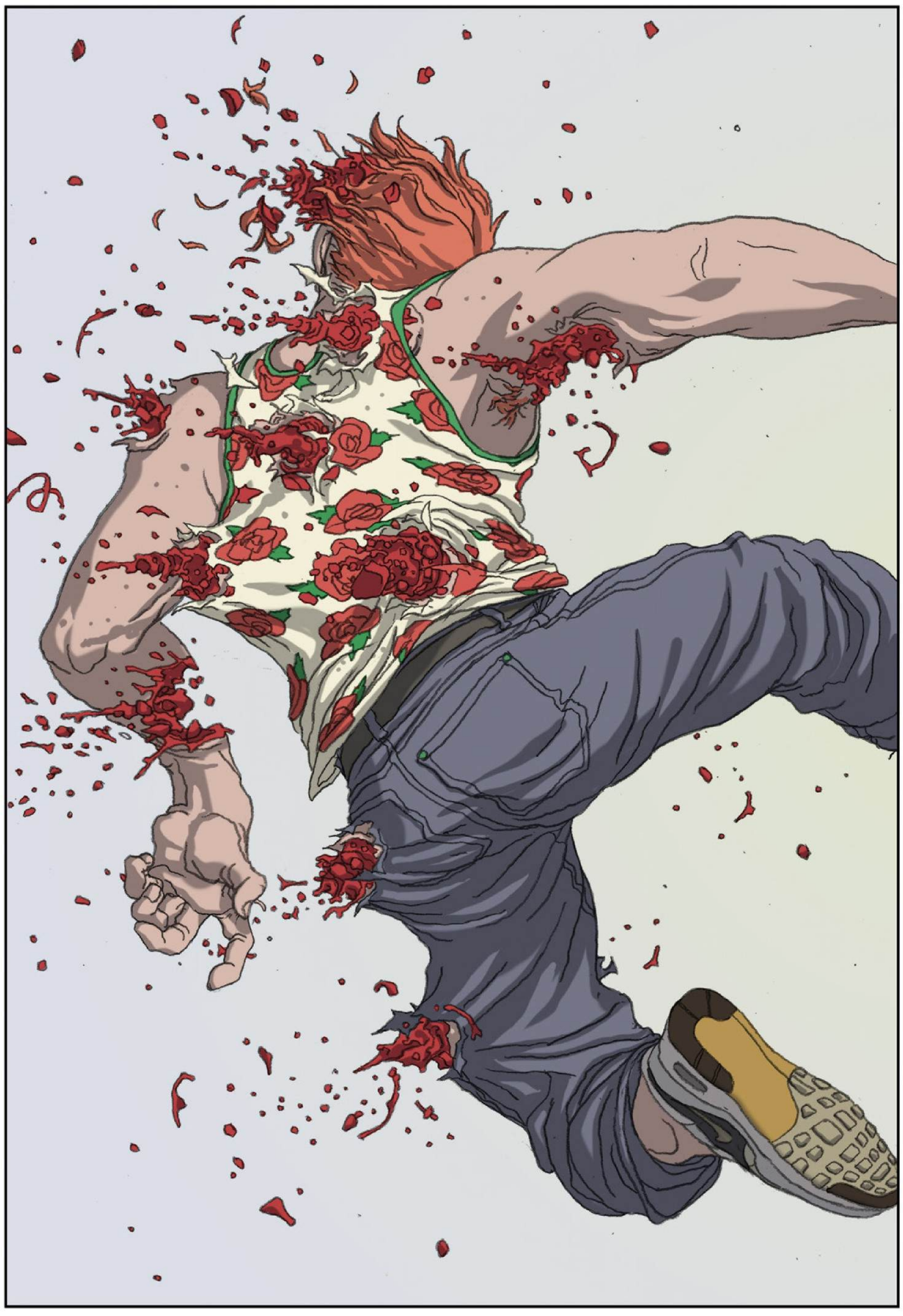
NO...

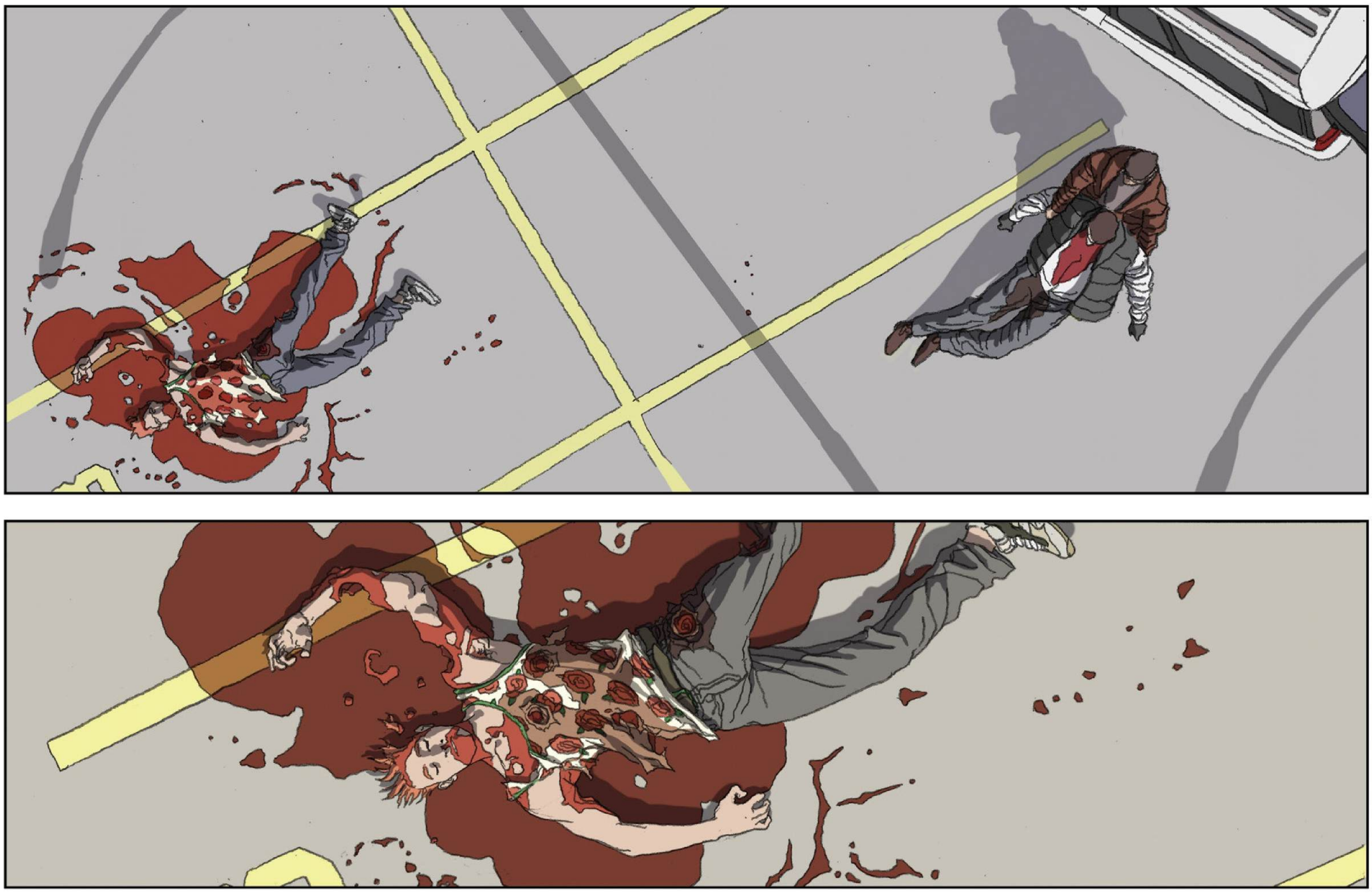
YOU DO NOW. TAKE IT. GET FAR AWAY FROM HERE.

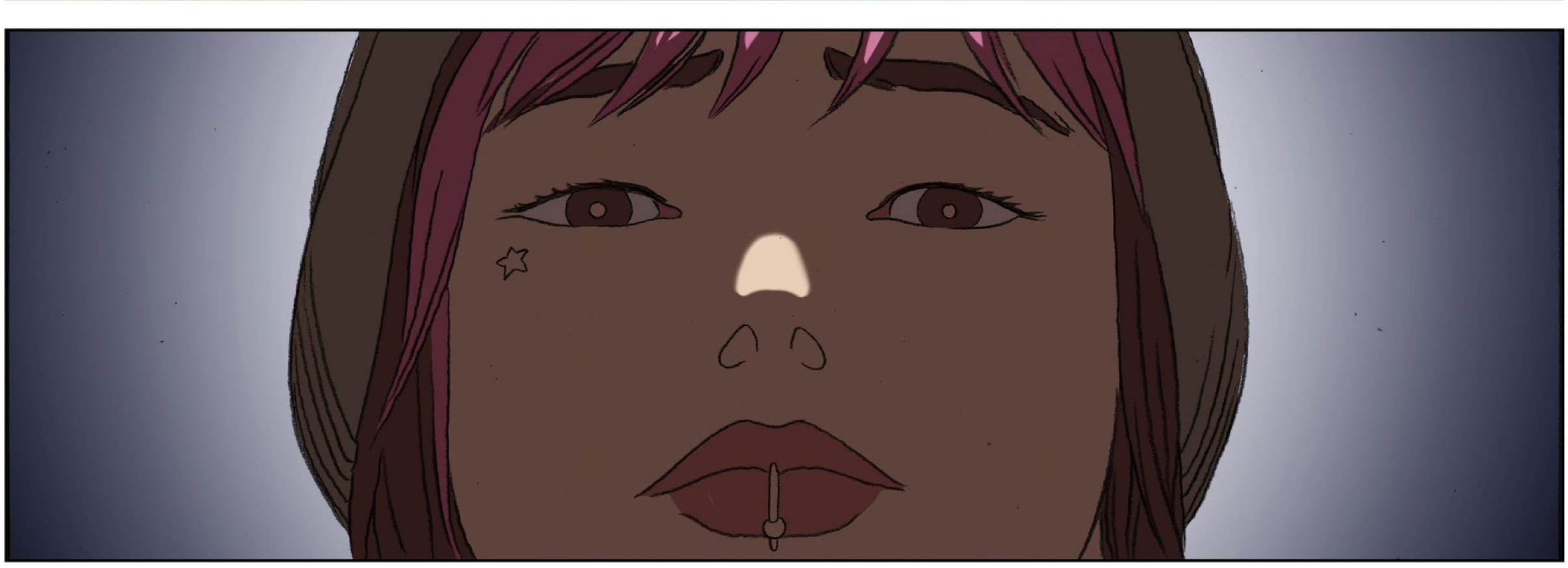
THANK YOU...THANK YOU SO MUCH.

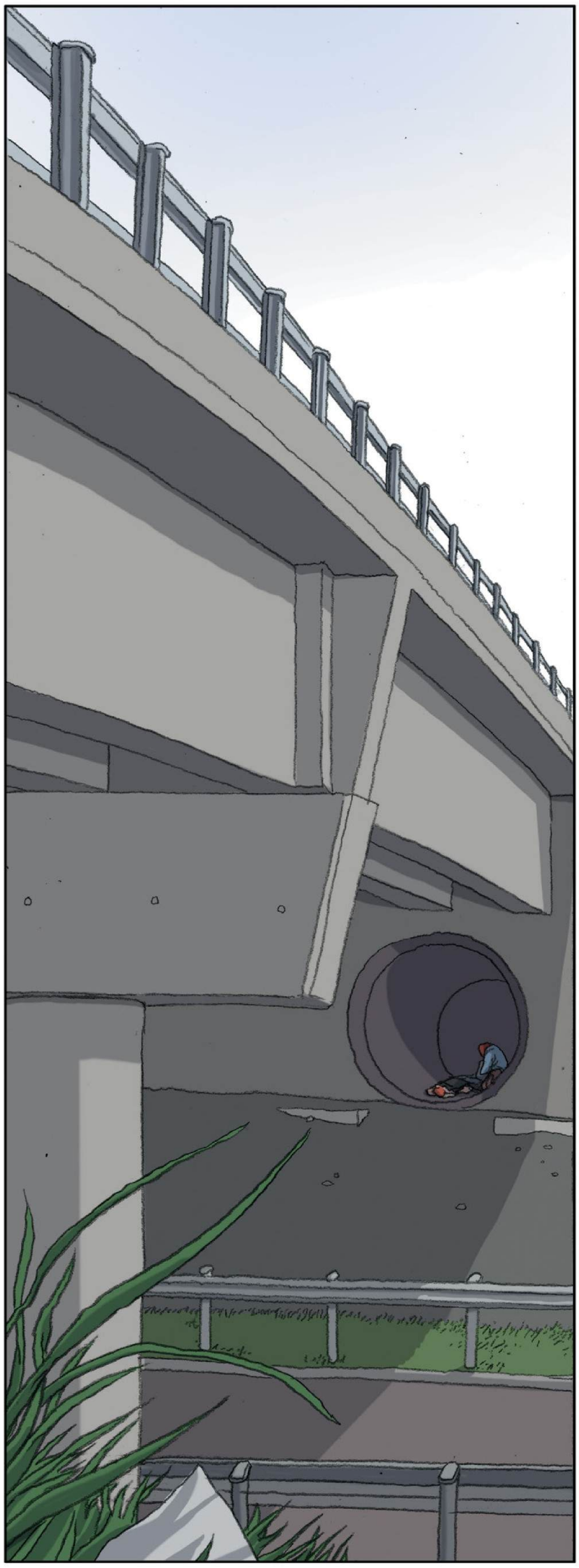

HEY, FREAK!

BRRRRRRDD
BRRRRRRDD
BRRRRRRDD

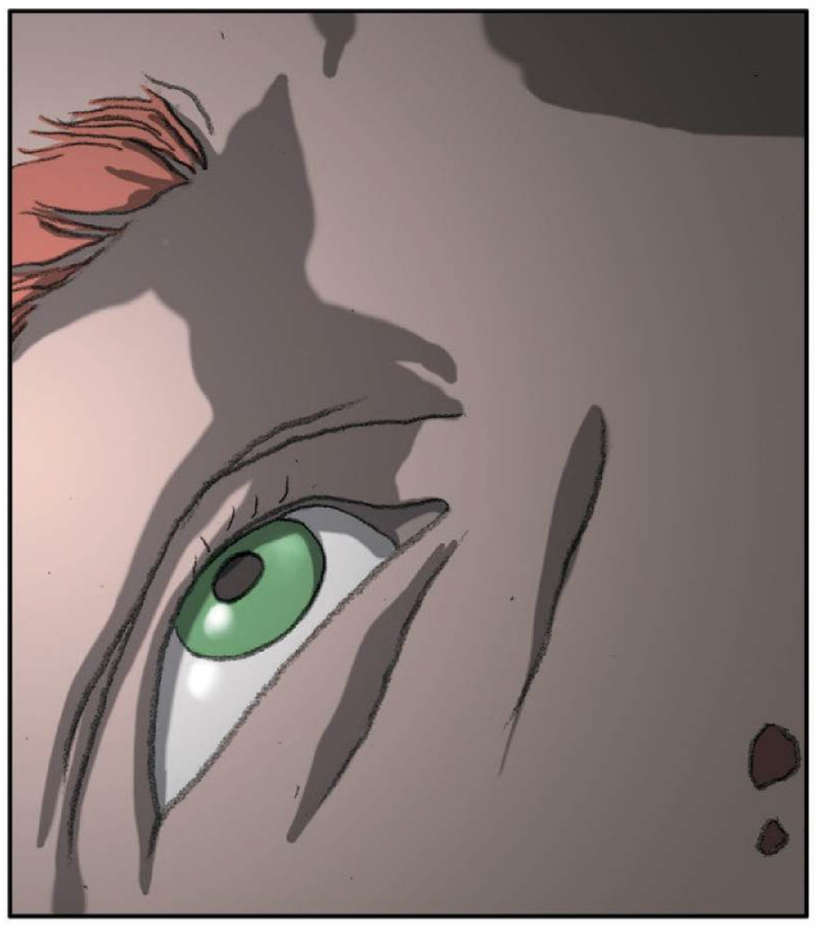








...GODDAMNIT...



ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

THERE YOU ARE...

YOU...

...YOU FOUND ME...

YES, YOU WERE HURT--

NO...I MEAN, *YOU* FOUND ME.

I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU... I'VE BEEN WAITING SO LONG...AFTER A WHILE I THOUGHT YOU WOULD NEVER...WOULD NEVER--

ARE YOU SURE YOU'RE OKAY?

I AM... I AM...

NOW.

SO WHAT'S YOUR NAME?
U.
ISABELLE. YOU?
YES.
YES, WHAT?
U.
ISABELLE. DID I MISS SOMETHING? WHAT'S YOUR NAME?
U.
U? THAT'S IT? THAT'S YOUR NAME?
YES.
IT'S NOT MUCH OF A NAME.
IT WAS ALL I COULD FIND.
HOW DID I GET HERE?
I CARRIED YOU. WELL, DRAGGED.
ADRENALINE.
YOU'RE STRONGER THAN YOU LOOK.
AH.
SO DO YOU WANT TO KNOW MY NAME?

I KNOW YOUR NAME.

I'VE *ALWAYS* KNOWN YOUR NAME.

I JUST DON'T KNOW HOW TO SPELL IT.

OR PRONOUNCE IT.

ISABELLE. *I-S-A-B-E-L-L-E.*

ISABELLE.

YES. THAT WAS IT.

I FOR ISABELLE.

U AND I.

OF COURSE.

SO WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

I TAKE YOU TO WHERE I LIVE. TO LET YOU SEE WHAT I SEE.

THEN WE HURT THE PEOPLE WHO HURT ME.

AND THE PEOPLE WHO HURT YOU.

HOW DO YOU KNOW ANYONE HURT ME?

THE SAME WAY I KNEW WHO YOU WERE, I FOR ISABELLE.

I'VE BEEN *WAITING* FOR YOU.

FOR SO LONG, SO LONG...SO VERY, VERY LONG.

THIS IS WHERE YOU LIVE?

YES--

--HOME.

THERE ARE AN AWFUL LOT OF ANCHOVIES IN HERE. LIKE, A *LOT*-A LOT. BUT MAYBE THERE'S SOMETHING I CAN DO WITH THE REST. DO YOU JUST *EAT* OUT OF--

YOU DON'T HAVE TO--

I WANT TO.

DO YOU HAVE ANY FOOD? I'M STARVING. I CAN'T EVEN REMEMBER THE LAST TIME I ATE.

OF COURSE. THOSE WHO I HELP GIVE ME THINGS. FOOD. CLOTHES. WHATEVER THEY HAVE TO SPARE.

DO YOU HAVE POTS? PANS? PLATES? FORK AND KNIFE?

I--

CLEAN ONES?

I'M SURE I DO... SOMEWHERE...

I DIDN'T WANT TO PRY EARLIER, BUT THE WAY YOU WERE NEARLY DEAD AND NOW IT'S ALL FIXED...YOU'RE A REBORN, AREN'T YOU? I MEAN, WITH POWERS...I SURVIVED BUT DIDN'T GET ANYTHING.

I WAS SICK. I GOT BETTER. AND THERE WAS A VOICE--

IF YOU HAVE COURAGE, STEP FORTH, AND I SHALL TELL YOU WHO U ARE, WHAT U MUST DO, WHY I HAVE SPARED U, AND WHY. U. ARE.

AND DID IT TELL YOU?

NO. NOT THEN. I WOULD HAVE TO WAIT.

WAIT FOR WHAT?

FOR YOU TO SHOW UP, IN THIS FORM, IN THIS MOMENT.

WHILE I'VE BEEN WAITING, I HAVE FOUGHT AS BEST I CAN AGAINST THE FORCES OF THE ENEMY AND HIS COURT OF SHADOWS.

IS THAT WHAT YOU WERE DOING WHEN I SAW YOU IN THE PARKING LOT?

YES. BUT FOR EVERY ONE I BRING DOWN, TWO MORE RISE TO TAKE THEIR PLACE.

BECAUSE THEIR BOSSES ARE STILL THEIR BOSSES. DO YOU KNOW WHO THEY ARE?

NO.

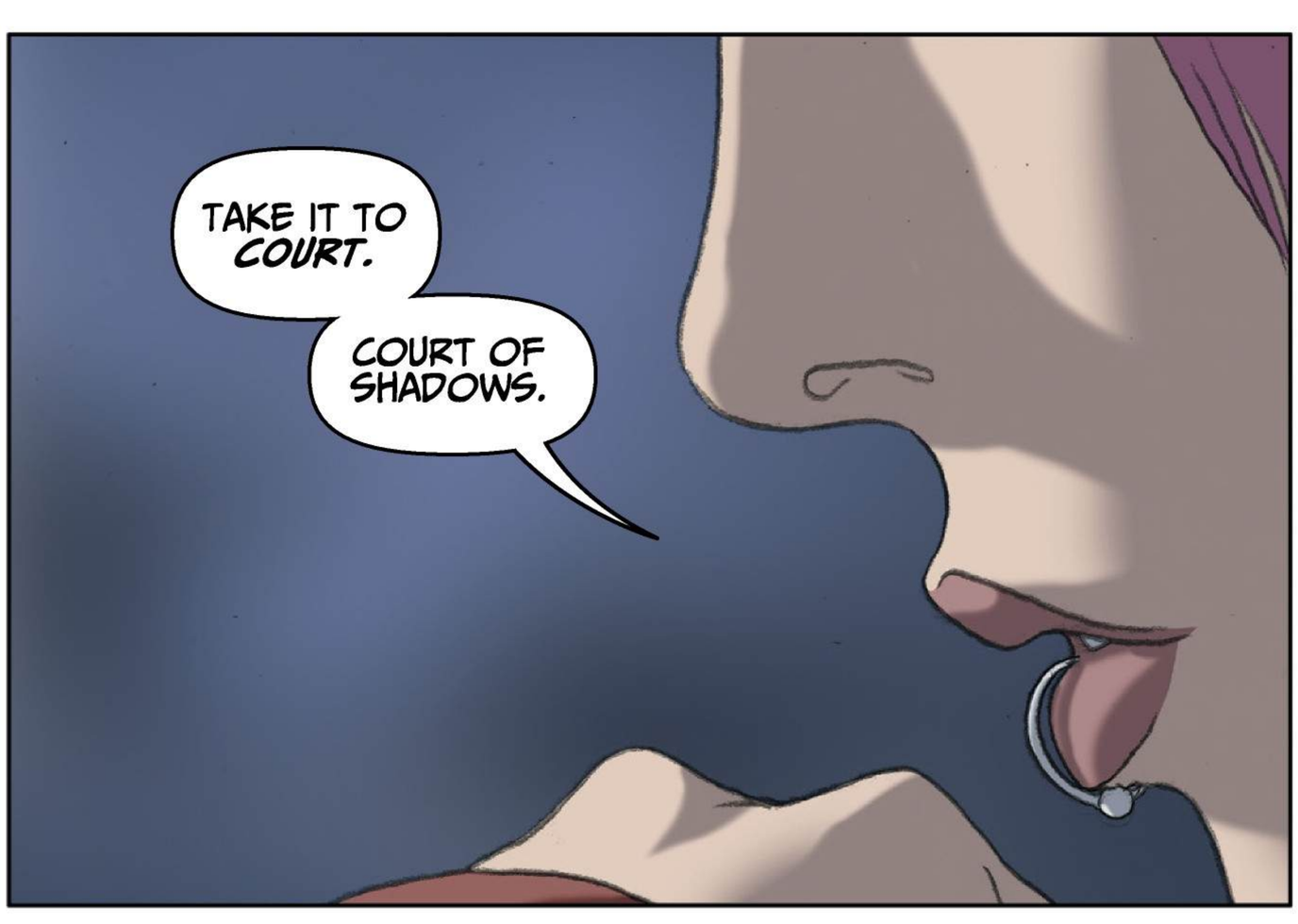
THEN HOW DO YOU KNOW WHAT TO CALL THEM?

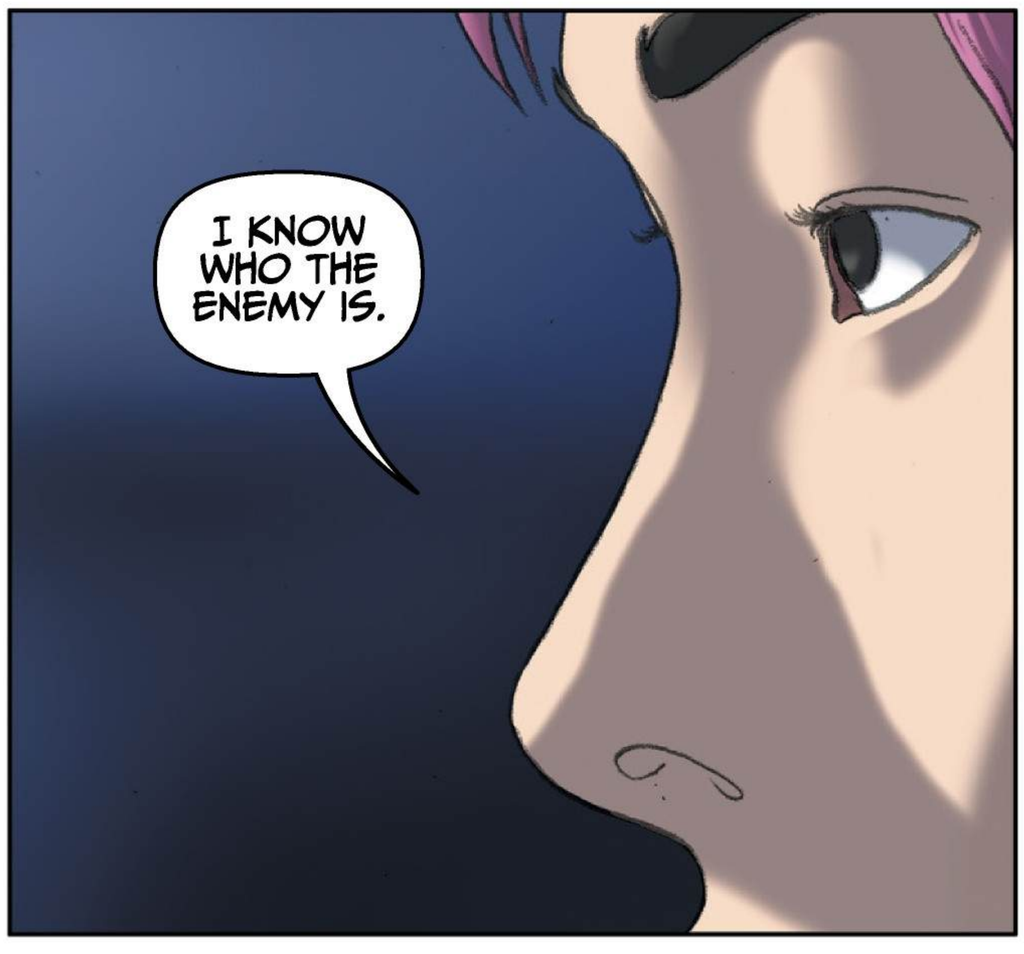
BECAUSE THERE IS ALWAYS AN *ENEMY*, AND ALWAYS A *COURT OF SHADOWS.*

BUT I WASN'T WORRIED, BECAUSE I KNEW SOONER OR LATER YOU WOULD COME ALONG AND EXPLAIN IT TO ME, AND TELL ME WHAT TO DO.

PLEASE TELL ME WHAT TO DO.

IT'S EASY TO BLAME THE GOVERNMENT AND OTHER PEOPLE FOR OUR OWN MISTAKES, ISABELLE.
I DIDN'T MAKE A *MISTAKE.* I GOT *SICK* DURING A *PLANETARY PANDEMIC* AND I LOST MY *JOB* AND MY *FATHER* AND--
YOU LET YOURSELF GET SICK BECAUSE YOU WERE *LAZY.* BECAUSE YOU DIDN'T TAKE *CARE* OF YOURSELF. SAME AS YOUR *FATHER.*
LAZY, BOTH OF YOU.
...YOUR FATHER GAVE THAT MONEY TO YOUR *UNCLE* TO LOOK AFTER BECAUSE HE KNEW YOU COULDN'T BE *TRUSTED* TO USE IT *WISELY.*
THAT'S NOT WHAT DADDY WANTED--
OUR ATTORNEY DISAGREES.
IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO TAKE THIS TO *COURT*--
YOU KNOW I CAN'T AFFORD TO *DO* THAT--


TAKE IT TO *COURT.*
COURT OF SHADOWS.


I KNOW WHO THE ENEMY IS.

WHAT SHE SAYS...

THE ENEMY IS INDIFFERENCE.

THE ENEMY IS ENTITLEMENT.

THE ENEMY IS THE PEOPLE WHO THINK THEY *OWN* US AND *CONTROL* US, WHO THINK THEY'RE *INVULNERABLE*--

--*UNTOUCHABLE*.

THE ENEMY IS A SYSTEM CREATED TO KEEP A FEW PEOPLE IN CHARGE AND EVERYONE ELSE SO SCARED OR SO POOR THAT THEY CAN'T FIGHT BACK.

THE BIG BANKS. THE CORPORATIONS. THE RICH. THE POWERFUL.

BUT HOW DO WE FIGHT THAT?

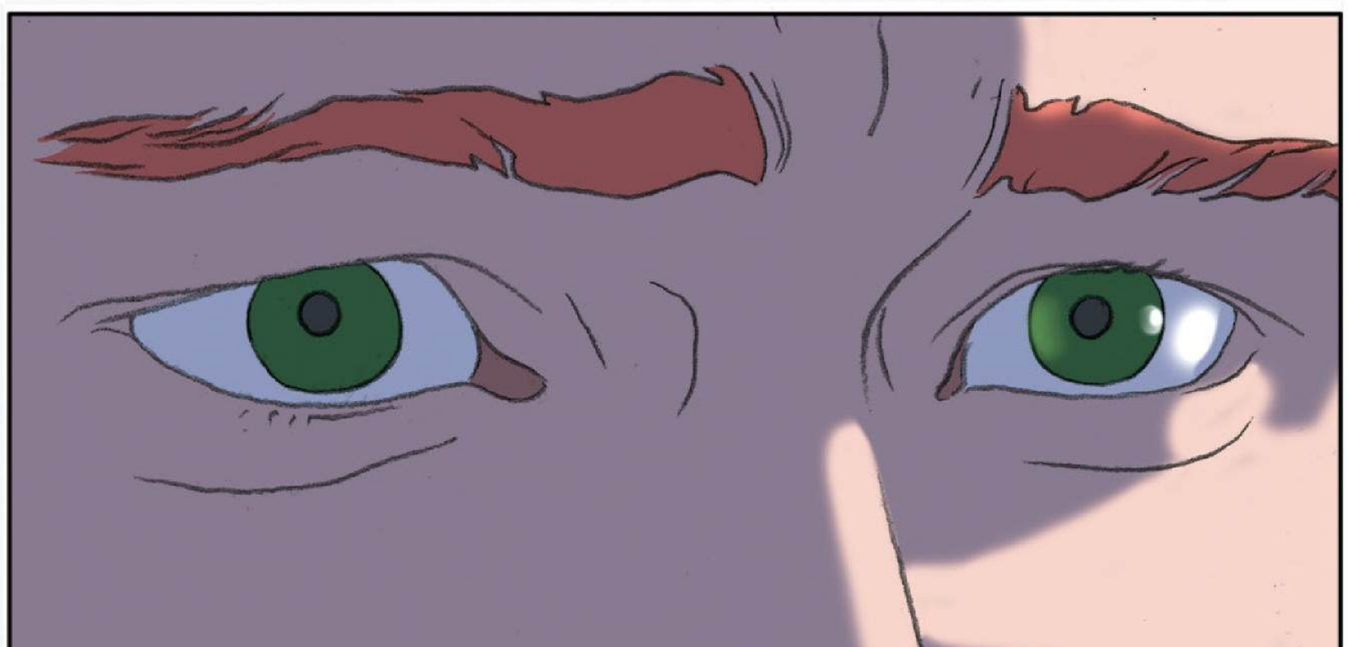
WHAT HE HEARS...

THE ENEMY ARE THE DARK LORDS WHO HAVE CORRUPTED THE LAWS OF OUR LAND, WHO USE THEIR VAST RICHES AND POWER TO PREY UPON THE PEOPLE, WHO TAKE AND TAKE AND GIVE NOTHING BACK BUT SORROW AND GRIEF AND EMPTINESS.

WE MUST TAKE IT BACK.

WE MUST TAKE IT *ALL* BACK.

BUT HOW DO WE FIGHT THAT?



WE BRING THE EVIL OUT IN THE OPEN. WE BRING THE EVIL TO US.

THANK YOU. NOW I KNOW WHERE TO START.

"YOU ALWAYS KNOW WHEN IT'S FRIDAY IN THIS PART OF TOWN."

CHECKS CASHED

"ALL THE *LOSERS* LINE UP WITH THEIR PENNY-ANTE ITSY BITSY CHECKS. NOT WORTH OUR TIME--"

--OR THE BULLET TO PUT THEM OUT OF THEIR MISERY.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND, SERGEY... IF THEY BRING SO LITTLE, IF THEY'RE NOT WORTH OUR TIME--

--HOW IS ALL THIS POSSIBLE?

ANDREI, YOU'RE HERE BECAUSE MY SISTER SAID YOU WERE OLD ENOUGH TO COME INTO THE FAMILY BUSINESS. SHE SAID YOU WERE A HARD WORKER. SAID THAT YOU WERE GOOD AT FOLLOWING INSTRUCTIONS. YOU KNOW WHAT SHE DID *NOT* TELL ME?

WHAT?

THAT YOU ARE AN IDIOT.

WHAP

AGH!

WHAT WE GET FROM THE CHECK CASHING OUT FRONT COULDN'T KEEP ME IN VODKA AND CIGARETTES FOR A WEEK. BUT JUST THE PERCENTAGE WE GET OF WHAT'S LAUNDERED THROUGH HERE FROM DRUGS, GAMBLING, WOMEN, ALL THE REST... I COULD BUY A MERCEDES EVERY WEEK.

BUT... WHERE WOULD YOU PUT THEM?

ANDREI?

YES, SERGEY?

WHAP

OW!

STOP TALKING--

--AND TAKE SOME MORE SMALL CHANGE TO THE PISSANTS IN THE OTHER ROOM.

RIGHT.

OKAY... TWO HUNDRED DOLLARS, MINUS FEES AND HANDLING OF FIFTEEN PERCENT--

I THOUGHT TEN PERCENT WAS THE MOST--

IN HERE IT'S FIFTEEN PERCENT. YOU WANT TO GO SOMEWHERE ELSE, GO.

THERE *ISN'T* ANYPLACE ELSE AROUND HERE, NOT SINCE *YOU* CAME IN.

SO IT'S FIFTEEN PERCENT. UNLESS YOU WANT TO COMPLAIN MORE, THEN IT'S TWENTY. YOU WANT TO COMPLAIN MORE?

NO--

GOOD. THEN SHUT UP.

NEXT!

I DON'T HAVE A CHECK--

SO WHAT DO YOU--

I HAVE A QUESTION.

WHY DO YOU WHO *HAVE* SO MUCH, *TAKE* SO MUCH, AND *GIVE* SO LITTLE, TO THOSE WHO *HAVE* SO LITTLE?

=SIGH=

NEXT.

I'LL LEAVE WHEN YOU ANSWER MY QUESTION.

SOMEBODY GET SERGEY--

NO, IT'S OKAY, I'VE GOT THIS--

HELLO, DO YOU HAVE AN ANSWER TO MY QUESTION?

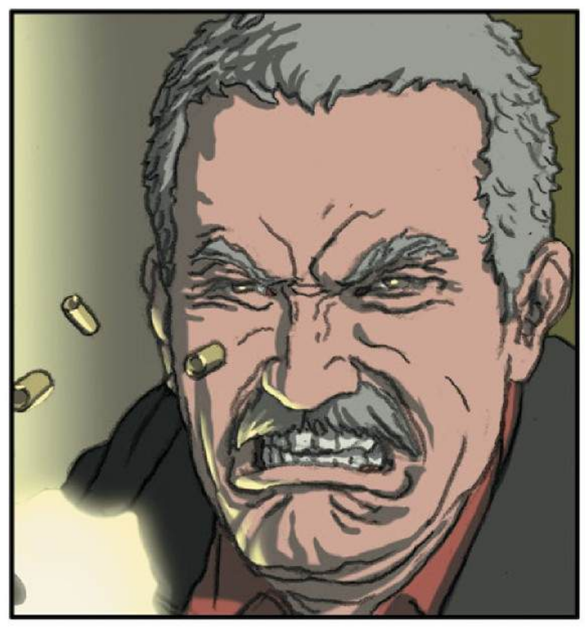
YEAH, IT'S OUT IN THE STREET, WHICH IS WHERE I'M GONNA PUT YOU--

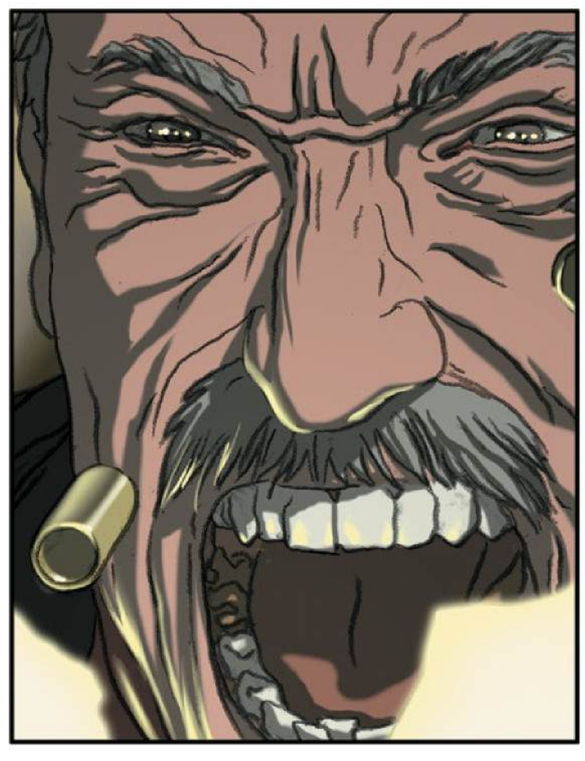
CRASH!

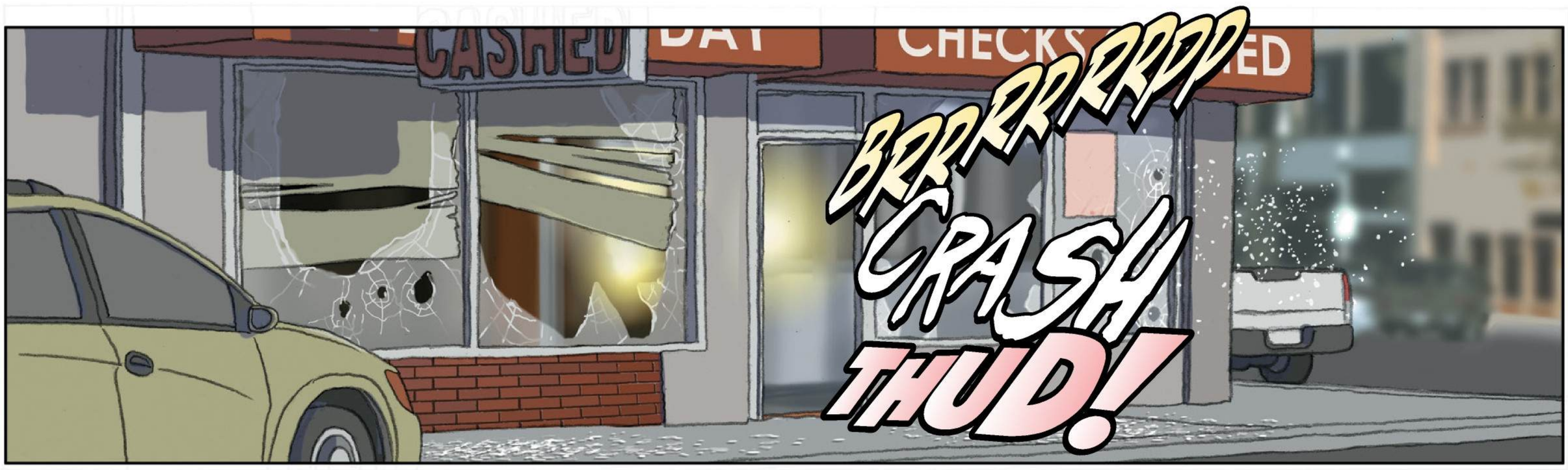
WE BUY GOLD

GET HIM!

BRR-RR-RRD
BRR-RR-RRD
BRR-RR-RRD






CASHED
DAY
CHECKS
ED
BRRRRRRP
CRASH
THUD!

CASHED
DAY
CHECKS CASHED

CASHE.
DAY
CHECKS CASHED

HEY
YDAY
CHECKS
CASHE.
CHECKS CASHED

THE DARK FORCES HAVE HURT YOU--

--BECAUSE THEY'VE BEEN *ALLOWED* TO HURT YOU. BECAUSE THEY'VE BEEN *ENCOURAGED* TO HURT YOU. BECAUSE NOTHING IS EVER *DONE* TO THEM.

BECAUSE THEY THINK THEY'RE *UNTOUCHABLE.*

"WE'VE JUST SHOWN THEM THEY'RE NOT SO UNTOUCHABLE AFTER ALL."

OHMYGOD--

--THE MONEY--

--AND *RETURNED.*

"WHAT THEY'VE *STOLEN* CAN BE TAKEN *BACK* AGAIN--"

THIS IS THE BEGINNING--
--OF THEIR END.

YOU'RE SURE IT'S THE SAME FREAK?

YEAH...SHOWED IT TO SOME OF MY GUYS WHO GOT INTO A SCRAP WITH HIM LAST WEEK. THEY WERE SURE THEY TOOK HIM OUT.

1910

73

48

191

LOOKS PRETTY LIVELY TO ME.

AND WHO'S THIS?

NO IDEA... PROBABLY SOME LOOKEY-LOO.

HMMM...

YOU THINK HE CAN TAKE CARE OF IT?

YES. MEANWHILE, YOU'RE STILL ON THE HOOK FOR THE MONEY YOU WERE PROCESSING.

BUT--

OR I CAN HAVE HIM DEAL WITH YOU FIRST, *THEN* THE FREAK.

OKAY...FINE, I CAN DO IT...JUST GET RID OF HIM BEFORE HE CAUSES ME ANY ***MORE*** PROBLEMS.

THIS IS WHAT I DO, SERGEY.

I SOLVE PROBLEMS.

WAIT HERE.

THIS IS THE ONE. CAN YOU DO IT?

EASY. DEAD BY THURSDAY.

WEDNESDAY? I HAVE GOLF THURSDAY.

DONE.

BIG CHUG

--WHERE VIDEO OF THE SCENE WENT VIRAL OVERNIGHT, RACKING UP MILLIONS OF VIEWS--

HEYDAY PA

CHECK CASHE

HE WAS LIKE ROBIN HOOD, TAKING FROM THE RICH JERKS WHO'VE BEEN PREYING ON THIS NEIGHBORHOOD AND GIVING IT BACK TO THE PEOPLE--

IT'S THEFT! IT'S TERRORISM! WHAT HAPPENS IF EVERYBODY DECIDES TO START KNOCKING OVER BANKS NEXT JUST BECAUSE THEY FEEL LIKE IT? THIS IS COMMUNISM--

2:13 / 6:24

--I CAN'T COMMENT ON AN ONGOING INVESTIGATION. WHAT IS CURIOUS IS THAT AMONG THE CURRENCY FOUND AT THE SCENE IS A SIGNIFICANT AMOUNT OF MONEY TIED TO RECENT HOME INVASION ROBBERIES AND DRUG DEALS--

THAT'S HIM.

ANYBODY KNOW THIS GUY? ANYBODY EVER *SEEN* THIS GUY?

NOPE.

DOESN'T RING A BELL.

NOT A VERY GOOD PICTURE. HE PROBABLY LOOKS BETTER IN PERSON.

I'M PRETTY SURE THIS IS THE SAME GUY WHO'S BEEN INTERFERING IN OUR *COLLECTIONS* AND *PROTECTION* FEES FOR *MONTHS* NOW.

SO I PULLED IN A FAVOR FROM A COP DOWNTOWN WHO OWES ME. HE SAID THEY DIDN'T GET ANY PRINTS OFF THE STORE.

BUT HE'S NOT WEARING GLOVES.

WHICH BRINGS ME TO THE WEIRD PART.

HE SAID THEY WERE ABLE TO PULL THE *PADS* OF HIS FINGERS OFF THE COUNTER IN THE STORE AND OTHER PLACES, BUT THERE WERE NO PRINTS *INSIDE* THE PADS.

THEY DIDN'T GET FINGERPRINTS OFF THIS GUY BECAUSE HE DOESN'T *HAVE* ANY.

REBORN.

CRAP.

DON'T WORRY.

I OWN ONE OF THOSE *MYSELF*...AND ONCE WE FIND THIS GUY, HE CAN TAKE CARE OF THIS.

MAIN THING NOW IS TO *FIND* HIM--

"--OR HIS FRIENDS, IF THAT'LL GET US THERE FASTER."

THAT WAS SO AMAZING--

YES, IT WAS. *WE* WERE. ARE.

THIS HAS *GOT* TO MAKE THE BIG BAD GUYS NERVOUS. PROBABLY THE FIRST TIME THEY'VE EVER FELT THE SAME KIND OF NERVOUS THEY LIKE MAKING EVERYONE *ELSE* FEEL.

STEP ONE IN FLUSHING THEM OUT SO WE CAN FLUSH THEM *DOWN* THE TOILET.

SO WHERE ARE WE GOING? YOU DIDN'T SAY.

TO SEE MY FRIENDS.

I THOUGHT YOU DIDN'T HAVE ANY.

THERE ARE FRIENDS ONE DOESN'T SPEAK OF UNTIL THE TIME IS RIGHT.

AND IS THE TIME RIGHT NOW?

OH, YES.

MEET THE ODDBALLS...

OHMYGOD--

--IT'S U!

YES, IT IS.

HEY, EVERYBODY, U'S HERE!

I HEARD YOU WERE DEAD!

I WAS, I GOT BETTER.

YES, BUT LOOKS AREN'T EVERYTHING.

YOU'RE FUNNY!

HI, I'M ISABELLE--

ARE YOU A FRIEND OF U?

YES. BUT HE DIDN'T TELL ME ANYTHING ABOUT YOU.

AH, WELL, I GUESS YOU COULD SAY WE'RE THE DISCARDED.

ODDBALLS, U CALLS US. AND HE'S NOT WRONG. IT'S A LONG STORY, AND--

--AND YOU MUST BE HUNGRY. WOULD YOU LIKE SOMETHING TO EAT?

WE COULDN'T POSSIBLY--

YES.

--YES.

"HER NAME WAS MARIAN."

SHE'S A *REBORN* LIKE THE REST OF US, BUT WAY STRONG... POWERFUL--

SHE'S BEEN GOING AROUND SETTING UP SAFE PLACES FOR PEOPLE LIKE US. BUT WE WERE THE FIRST.

WE CALL OURSELVES *THE DISCARDED.*

SEE THE RESISTANCE: REBORNS: THE LOST

EVERYONE HERE IS A REBORN, BUT MOST OF US HAVE LOW POWERS. WE DON'T LEAVE BECAUSE PEOPLE KNOW WE'RE BARELY ABLE TO DEFEND OURSELVES.

THOSE WHO LEAVE, DON'T COME BACK. THE HATERS, YOU KNOW?

WE'VE BEEN TALKING TO *HER*, AND SHE HAS *PLANS* FOR US, AND WHEN THE DAY IS RIGHT WE'RE ALL GOING TO COME UP OUT OF HERE LIKE GHOSTS RISING FROM THEIR GRAVES.

AND WE'LL HAVE A PLACE AGAIN. *ALL* OF US.

AND WE'RE GOING TO REMAKE THE *WORLD.*

BUT TO DO THAT, WE NEED A *PROTECTOR.* SOMEONE WITH A LOT MORE POWER THAN *WE* HAVE, ALONE OR TOGETHER.

WE THINK YOU'RE THE ONE WE'VE BEEN WAITING FOR.

YOU IN?

"AND SHE WAS."

AFTER SHE SET UP THIS PLACE, SHE WENT OFF TO DO THE SAME FOR OTHERS.

BUT WASN'T IT HARD NOT HAVING ANYONE TO PROTECT YOU?

I SAID MARIAN WAS *GONE*--

--I DIDN'T SAY WE WERE *UNPROTECTED*.

I DO WHAT I CAN TO HELP. IT ISN'T THAT MUCH, REALLY.

LISTEN TO HIM--

A FEW MONTHS AGO, WE HAD A *PROBLEM* WITH A *GANG* WHO WAS THREATENING PEOPLE HERE, BEATING THEM UP IF THEY DIDN'T PAY.

"HE TOLD THEM IF THEY HAD A PROBLEM, TO TAKE IT TO HIM."

"STRANGELY, AFTER THAT, THERE WASN'T A PROBLEM ANY MORE."

"DID WE GET A GOOD *LOOK* AT HIM?"

IT WAS DARK. HE WAS FAST. AND HE WAS HITTING US, REALLY HARD, A LOT. AND NOT AS BLURRY AS THIS PICTURE.

I UNDERSTAND--

HE PROBABLY LOOKS BETTER IN PERSON.

WE'VE *ESTABLISHED* THAT.

I DUNNO, MAN...MAYBE IT COULD BE THE SAME GUY, MAYBE NOT... BEST I CAN DO. THIS THE DUDE THAT KNOCKED OVER THE CHECK CASHING STORE?

YEAH. WHY?

EVERYBODY'S TALKIN' ABOUT IT. IF IT *IS* THE SAME GUY, HE'S DECLARING WAR ON *YOU* JUST LIKE HE DID ON *US*.

GOOD LUCK WITH THAT.

YOU'RE MISSING THE POINT.

IN *THIS* TOWN, THERE ARE PEOPLE YOU DO NOT *MESS* WITH. PEOPLE YOU DO NOT *STEAL* FROM. PEOPLE WHO LIVE AT THE HIGHEST POINT, ABOVE THE FRAY, WHO DO NOT LIKE HAVING TO *ENTER* THE FRAY...AND WHO YOU SHOULD NEVER *WANT* TO ENTER THE AFOREMENTIONED FRAY. BECAUSE WHEN THEY *DO*--

--PEOPLE GET *HURT* AND PEOPLE *DIE*.

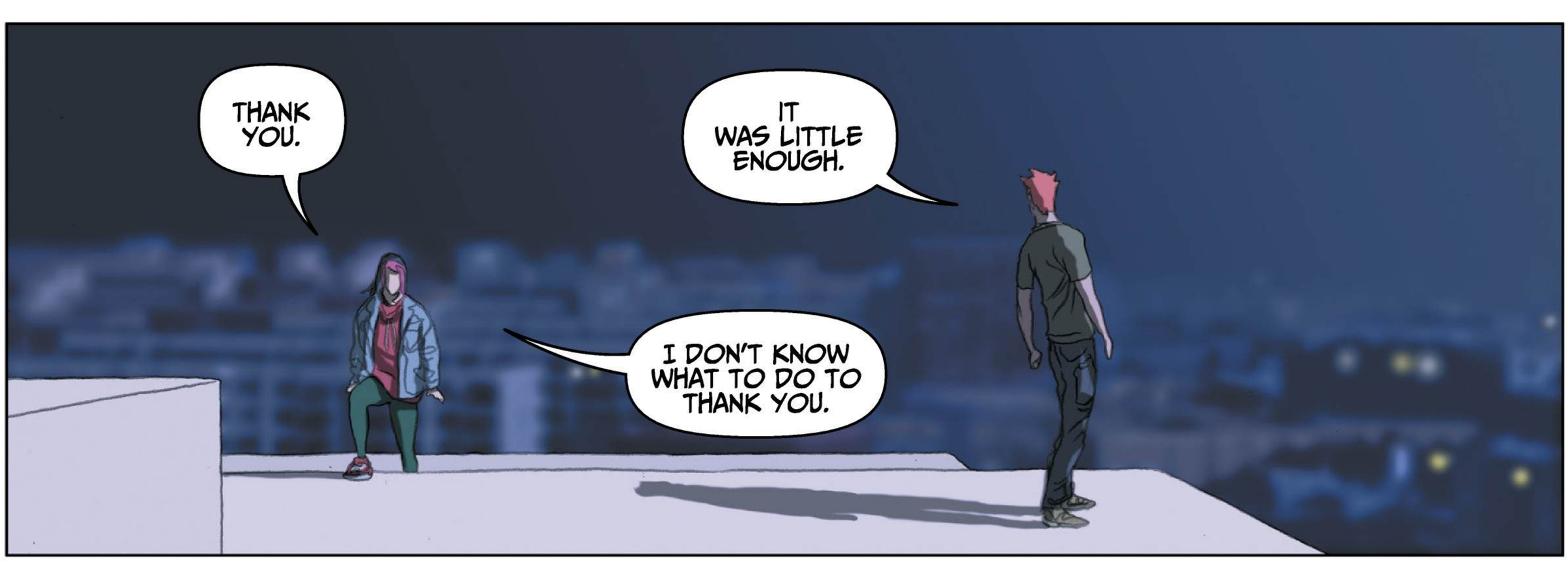
A *LOT* OF THEM.

EXIT

"I DON'T GET IT."

WHAT'S TO GET? THIS IS YOUR PLACE NOW.
I CAN'T PAY FOR IT--
THAT'S ALL RIGHT, VERY FEW OF US CAN. VERY FEW OF US *HAVE* TO, THANKS TO YOU.
ME?
NO, U.
O? WHO'S O?
OH.
NEVER MIND.
IT'S JUST... I'M NOT ONE OF *YOU*, I'M NOT A *REBORN*.
U TOLD US THAT YOU--AS IN *YOU*--WERE ON THE RUN, LIVING ON THE STREET.
HE LIVES IN A SEWER DRAIN.
TO YOU AND ME, A SEWER DRAIN. TO HIM, A PLACE OF GREAT BEAUTY. AND WE WOULD NEVER PULL HIM FROM THAT.
HE HAS DONE SO MUCH FOR US, THIS IS THE LEAST WE CAN DO FOR HIM.
OKAY, BUT WHY *ME?* I'M SURE HE KNOWS ALL KINDS OF PEOPLE WHO COULD USE THE HELP.
OH, I'M SURE HE DOES, BUT--
--IT'S OBVIOUS TO A BLIND MAN THAT HE *LIKES* YOU...HE *CARES* FOR YOU.
HE'S BEEN WAITING FOR YOU FOR SO LONG, ISABELLE. SO VERY, VERY LONG.

THEY TOLD ME WHAT YOU DID FOR ME.


THANK YOU.
IT WAS LITTLE ENOUGH.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO TO THANK YOU.

YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND.
OBVIOUSLY.
IT'S NOT WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR ME. IT'S WHAT I CAN DO FOR YOU. YOU DON'T NEED TO DO ANYTHING AT ALL. YOU JUST NEED TO BE.
I STILL DON'T UNDERSTAND.
OBVIOUSLY.

LET ME TELL YOU WHAT I SEE, WHEN I LOOK OUT OVER THIS PLACE.

I SEE PEOPLE WHO HAVE LOST THEIR WAY. WHO FIGHT ONLY FOR THEMSELVES. FOR FLAGS. FOR COUNTRIES. FOR CITY BLOCKS. FOR EGO. FOR POWER.
I SEE THE ANGUISHED BROKEN BONES OF DREAMS.
I SEE ENTITLEMENT. SELFISHNESS.
I SEE THAT WE CAN BE BETTER THAN WE ARE.
BUT THEY'VE FORGOTTEN HOW.
THEY'VE FORGOTTEN THE SECRET.

IT'S NOT ABOUT ME. IT'S ABOUT U. IT'S ABOUT SERVING SOMETHING AND SOMEONE IN A NOBLE CAUSE. AN IDEA. A LOVE. A SOUL OUTSIDE OURSELVES.

I HAVE WAITED SO LONG FOR SOMEONE TO PLEDGE MYSELF TO. SOMEONE TO LIVE AND LOVE AND DIE FOR. A HEART GREATER THAN MINE TO SHOW ME THE WAY TO BE ***MORE***, TO BE ***BETTER***, TO BE ***WHOLE***.

I HAVE WAITED SO LONG...FOR YOU.

BUT WHY ME? I'M NOBODY. I'M NOTHING. I HAVE NOTHING TO OFFER. I'M ALL ALONE.

WE ARE ***ALL*** ALONE. BUT YOU AND I--

--CAN BE ALONE TOGETHER.

I PLEDGE MYSELF TO YOU...TO STAND BY YOUR SIDE, TO DO ALL THINGS IN YOUR NAME, TO LIVE AND DIE AT YOUR WORD, ASKING ONLY THAT I MAY CALL UPON YOU IN TRIUMPH AND IN FAILURE.

BUT YOU DON'T EVEN ***KNOW*** ME.

I FIND ALL I KNOW AND ALL I WILL EVER NEED TO KNOW IN YOUR EYES. IT IS ENOUGH. IT WILL ALWAYS ***BE*** ENOUGH.

"IT'S AN...UNUSUAL REQUEST."

THAT'S WHY I CAME TO YOU, CAHILL. THE OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY--

ASSISTANT DISTRICT ATTORNEY--

--HAS ALL THE RESOURCES I NEED.

THE MORE I'VE DUG, THE CLEARER IT BECOMES THAT THIS MAN IS THE ONE WHO HAS BEEN MAKING LIFE DIFFICULT FOR MY ENFORCERS AND COLLECTORS FOR A LONG TIME NOW. BUT WE COULD NEVER GET A BEAD ON HIM. UNTIL NOW.

I DON'T KNOW WHY HE DECIDED TO PUT HIS HEAD OUT INTO THE LIGHT NOW, BUT I INTEND TO CUT IT OFF.

IN THIS OFFICE, YOU ARE, OF COURSE, SPEAKING METAPHORICALLY.

.....SURE.

I BELIEVE THIS IS A PART OF TOWN WHERE HE HANGS OUT. YOU PROBABLY HAVE SECURITY CAMERAS IN THE AREA--

WE HAVE THEM IN *EVERY* AREA--

WHICH IS WHY I'D LIKE ACCESS TO THE SERVERS. FIRST ACCESS. *PRIVATE* ACCESS.

THIS CAN BE WORKED OUT.

ANYTHING ELSE?

NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT, YES. TWO THINGS.

FIRST, I WANT THE ADA OFFICE TO PUT OUT A STATEMENT IDENTIFYING HIM AS A PERSON OF INTEREST IN SEVERAL INVESTIGATIONS AND THAT HE IS WANTED FOR QUESTIONING. THIS WILL PUT THE POLICE ON HIS TAIL.

ALSO DOABLE. AFTER ALL, WE ALREADY HAVE HIM ON VIDEO ROBBING A STORE. SO WHAT'S NUMBER TWO?

ABOUT THOSE SECURITY CAMERAS IN THE VICINITY OF OUR MAN...WHEN THE TIME COMES, I WANT YOU TO SHUT THEM OFF AND LEAVE THEM OFF UNTIL I SAY OTHERWISE.

WHY?

BECAUSE THERE ARE CERTAIN ***METAPHORS*** THAT YOU ARE NOT GOING TO WANT TO SEE.

SLAM

I'VE NEVER SEEN HIM SO HAPPY.

THANK YOU.

I'M JUST WORRIED THAT HE PICKED THE WRONG PERSON. I'M NOBODY SPECIAL.

MY MOTHER USED TO SAY THAT LOVING SOMEONE ISN'T ABOUT HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT THEM. IT'S ABOUT HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT YOURSELF WHEN YOU'RE WITH THEM.

HOW DOES HE MAKE YOU FEEL?

BUT YOU ARE, AROUND HIM.

BEAUTIFUL.

THEN THAT'S WHAT YOU ARE.

I'VE NEVER HAD ANYONE PLEDGE THEMSELVES TO ME BEFORE. MY UNCLE LIONEL ALWAYS SAID I WAS WORTHLESS.

"IF ONLY HE COULD SEE ME NOW."

LEVEL B

--SO YEAH, I'LL BE WORKING LATE AGAIN.

OH, LIONEL, I'M SORRY--

JUST GONNA GET A QUICK BITE THEN IT'S BACK TO THE GRINDSTONE. SEE YOU SOON, SWEETIE.

BEEP-BEEP

YO, LIONEL--

UFFFF!

YOU DIDN'T CALL ME BACK.

I...I FIGURED IT WAS A MISTAKE.

THE *MISTAKE* WAS NOT CALLING ME BACK.

AGGGH... WAIT... PLEASE...

I DON'T UNDERSTAND... I *PAID* THE MONTHLY--

THAT WAS BEFORE THE LAUNDRY GOT ROBBED. THE MONEY NEVER MADE IT TO US.

BUT... WHY IS THAT MY PROBLEM?

WHAT DO YOU THINK, WE'VE GOT FDIC BANK PROTECTION? WE CAN CALL UP A CREDIT CARD COMPANY TO FIX IT? *OUR* PROBLEM IS *YOUR* PROBLEM BECAUSE IT MEANS *WE* NEVER GOT YOUR *MONEY.*

I NEVER SHOULD HAVE GIVEN IN TO BLACKMAIL IN THE FIRST PLACE. YOU SAID IT WOULD BE ONE PAYMENT AND I'D BE FREE. BUT MONTH AFTER MONTH IT'S BEEN THE SAME--

YEAH, WELL, WE COULD DO A LOT WORSE.

GOTTA SAY, THE PHOTOS SHOW A MAN WHO KNOWS HOW TO HAVE FUN. HOOKERS, GAMBLING, COKE... YOU GOT THE CLASSIC TRIFECTA GOING, Y'KNOW?

SO WHICH ONE OF THOSE WERE YOU ON YOUR WAY TO TONIGHT WHEN YOU TOLD YOUR ***WIFE*** YOU WERE STUCK AT THE GRINDSTONE--

--"SWEETIE?"

IT'LL TAKE ME A FEW DAYS TO GET THE MONEY--

WOULD'VE HAD A WHOLE EXTRA DAY IF YOU'D CALLED ME BACK LIKE YOU'RE ***SUPPOSED*** TO.

MAKE THAT MISTAKE ***AGAIN*** AND THE ONLY FINANCIAL ISSUES ARE GONNA BE WHAT YOUR WIFE DOES WITH YOUR ***LIFE INSURANCE*** MONEY.

ARE WE CLEAR?

YEAH... YEAH, WE'RE CLEAR.

GOOD. MAKE SURE IT STAYS THAT WAY.

GODDAMNIT... GODDAMNIT... GODDAMNIT...

"WHAT'S THAT, BOSS?"

VIDEOS OF THE GUY WHO BUSTED UP OUR LAUNDRY. SOMETHING KEEPS BUGGING ME.

WHAT'S THAT?

EVERYBODY IS TAKING PICTURES OF THE GUY WHO DID IT. EVERYBODY IS *LOOKING* AT THE GUY WHO DID IT.

EXCEPT ONE PERSON.

SHE'S LOOKING AT EVERYONE *ELSE* LOOKING AT *HIM*. LOOKING AT THEIR *REACTIONS*.

UH-HUH--

--SO... WHY'S THAT IMPORTANT?

I COULD EXPLAIN, BUT IT WOULD BE LIKE TRYING TO EXPLAIN DRY TO A GOLDFISH.

YES, SIR.

"SEEING ANYTHING INTERESTING?"

NOT YET.

THE CITY HAS OVER 15,000 SECURITY CAMERAS WIRED TO THE POLICE DEPARTMENT, HOMELAND SECURITY, FEMA--

--ARE WE GONNA HAVE TO GO THROUGH ALL OF THEM, MR. BISHOP?

LET'S JUST STICK WITH THE AREA SURROUNDING THE ADDRESS I GAVE YOU--

THE ROBBERY SITE--

--AND GO OUT FROM THERE. AND IT'S *THE* BISHOP, NOT *MR.* BISHOP.

SO THAT'S *NOT* YOUR NAME, THEN?

WHIZZZZ

NO ONE KNOWS MY FULL NAME. NO ONE WILL *EVER* KNOW MY FULL NAME. NOW PLEASE CONTINUE WITH THE SCAN. YOU CAN DOUBLE-SPEED THEM IF YOU LIKE.

RIGHT.

YES! STOP RIGHT THERE! BACK UP JUST A LITTLE.

THERE YOU ARE....GOT YOU!

AND YOUR FRIEND.

WHO I IMAGINE IS CONSIDERABLY LESS BULLETPROOF THAN YOU ARE.

21:32:02 08:24

AA3

SO BEFORE WE BEGIN, ANY LAST MINUTE QUESTIONS?

NO? GOOD. THEN LET'S LOCK THIS DOWN.

THE *TARGET* WILL BE LEAVING THIS BUILDING ON SIXTH AVENUE AT 11:35 A.M. SO THE BLOCKADE WILL NEED TO BE IN PLACE BY 10:45 *LATEST* TO MAKE SURE THEY GO THE DIRECTION WE *WANT* THEM TO GO IN.

ALL SET.

GOOD.

ONCE THEY'RE IN MOTION, WE NEED TO KEEP EYES ON THE CAR AT ALL TIMES IN CASE THEY START TO GET SUSPICIOUS.

DOUG AND I WILL WORK THE ROOFTOPS, CAVENAUGH WILL BE DOING RELAYS.

THAT LEAVES YOU. END OF THE DAY, THIS IS ALL *ABOUT* YOU.

I'M FLATTERED.

WE'LL BUY YOU THE TIME YOU NEED TO TAKE THE SHOT. YOU GET TWO ARMOR-PIERCING BULLETS. TRY NOT TO USE THE SECOND ONE BECAUSE THEN THEY'LL BE ABLE TO ZERO YOUR LOCATION.

NEVER NEEDED MORE THAN ONE BEFORE.

THAT'S WHY YOU'RE HERE, MAKING THE BIG BUCKS.

I THOUGHT *WE* WERE MAKING THE BIG BUCKS.

SHUDDUP.

ASK YOU A QUESTION?

IF YOU GOTTA, SURE.

WHY *THIS* GUY?

WHAT'D HE DO SO BAD THAT HE NEEDS TO BE TAKEN OUT?

WE DON'T ASK THOSE KINDA QUESTIONS.

FUNNY, I JUST THOUGHT I DID.

THIS ISN'T SOME KIND OF ***PERFECT WORLD.*** PEOPLE MAKE ***ENEMIES.*** DOESN'T MATTER WHO THEY ARE.

I KEEP TELLING YOU, YOU CAN'T GO AROUND LOOKING AT THE WORLD THROUGH ***ROSE-COLORED GLASSES***, NOT IN THIS BUSINESS.

NOT IF YOU WANT TO STAY ***ALIVE.***

OUR CLIENTS FIGURE WITH SO MANY DYING EVERY DAY 'CAUSE OF THE ***BIG DEATH***, NOBODY'S GONNA EVEN ***NOTICE*** ONE MORE. SO AS FAR AS ***THEY'RE*** CONCERNED IT'S THE RIGHT MOMENT TO PULL THE TRIGGER ON THIS GUY. SO THAT'S WHAT WE'RE GONNA ***DO.***

YOU ***GOT*** THAT--

--UMBERTO?

I BROUGHT YOU SOME BREAKFAST.

I HOPE I DIDN'T--

--WAKE YOU.

NO... AND EVEN IF YOU DID, IT WAS FOR THE BEST. I HAVE--

--I HAVE SUCH DREAMS. I DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY MEAN. I KNOW ONLY THAT THEY ARE--

--TERRIFYING.

THEN MAYBE IT'S BETTER NOT TO TRY AND FIGURE THEM OUT. MAYBE SOME QUESTIONS ARE BETTER LEFT UNANSWERED.

WHICH REMINDS ME, I HAVE A QUESTION.

IN ALL THIS TIME, EVER SINCE WE MET...WHY HAVEN'T YOU TRIED TO KISS ME?

BECAUSE I'M NOT WORTHY OF YOU.

SILLY RABBIT.

THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT MAKES YOU WORTHY.

DOES THAT HELP?

YES.

A LITTLE OR A LOT?

YOU HAVE NO IDEA.

SO, WORTHIER?

WORKING ON IT.

"WE HAVE A GENERAL SENSE OF HIS GENERAL LOCATION."

PRETTY SURE YOU SHOULDN'T BE USING GENERAL TWICE IN THE SAME SENTENCE.

THE *POINT* IS, WE NOW KNOW WHERE TO FOCUS ON THE SURVEILLANCE CAMERAS.

IF WE PLACE YOU IN THE *MIDDLE* OF THE SURVEILLANCE AREA THE NEXT TIME HE SHOWS HIS FACE, THEN THERE'S A CHANCE OF YOU GETTING TO HIM BEFORE HE RUNS OFF.

AND WHEN YOU ARE DONE WITH HIM, YOU, MY *HAND*, WILL ENSURE THAT NO OTHERS LIKE THIS ONE COME ALONG TO CHALLENGE OUR AUTHORITY, OR THAT OF OUR ASSOCIATES.

SPEAKING OF WHICH, I HAVE AN ISSUE.

MY STREET NAME IS *THE HAND*. YOU'RE KNOWN IN THOSE SAME PLACES AS *THE BISHOP*.

YES. SO?

FEELS LIKE WE'RE KIND OF STEPPING ON EACH OTHER'S TOES.

I'M A BIG GUY, I LIKE *STRANGLING* PEOPLE, SO YEAH, *THE HAND* WORKS. BUT HAVING *THE BISHOP* JUST GETS WEIRD WHEN WE WORK TOGETHER.

COULDN'T YOU BE *THE RED BISHOP?* OR *BISHOP LAROUX*, SINCE THAT'S YOUR NAME?

YOU CAN'T HAVE A *RED BISHOP* BECAUSE RED IS FOR *CARDINALS*. AND IF I HAVE A STREET NAME THAT'S MY *OWN* NAME, WELL, IT RATHER DEFEATS THE POINT, DON'T YOU THINK?

HURM. I SUPPOSE. STILL DON'T LIKE IT. WHAT ABOUT *A BISHOP?*

LET IT GO.

YOU'LL BE STAYING IN *THIS* WHILE WE WAIT FOR WORD.

DRIVER?

WE'LL HAVE A FRESH DRIVER STANDING BY BEHIND THE WHEEL IN SIX-HOUR SHIFTS.

OUR TARGET IS A *TOUGH* ONE. FROM WHAT I HEAR, HE CAN HEAL IN A MATTER OF *SECONDS* FROM NEARLY ANY KIND OF INJURY.

NOT WORRIED.

YOU CAN'T *HEAL* WHAT'S NOT *THERE*. HE'S NOT ABOUT TO GROW A NEW *HEAD*. ONCE I TEAR *THAT* OFF, WE'RE GOOD.

ONE LAST THING.

SINCE I'M PROBABLY THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN *KILL* THIS GUY, MY RATE HAS GONE UP. DOUBLE. TWO MILLION.

DONE. BUT DO TRY TO GO EASY ON ANY BYSTANDERS.

"WE DON'T WANT A REPEAT OF WHAT HAPPENED THE *LAST* TIME YOU LOST YOUR TEMPER."

NO PROMISES.

"I'M AFRAID THIS IS JUST A BIT IRREGULAR."

WHY? IT'S JUST A SIMPLE WITHDRAWAL--

I KNOW, LIONEL, BUT--

I'VE HAD FULL TRUSTEE CONTROL OVER MY NIECE *ISABELLE'S* ACCOUNT FOR THREE YEARS. NO ISSUES. SO WHY IS THERE SUDDENLY A PROBLEM?

AS A MATTER OF POLICY, WE EXERCISE GREATER SCRUTINY FOR ALL TRANSACTIONS DURING THE LAST ***SIX MONTHS*** BEFORE A ***TRUST FUND*** CLIENT COMES INTO CONTROL OF THEIR BEQUEATHED FINANCES. THAT'S WHERE ANY...***PROBLEMS*** TEND TO HAPPEN THE MOST OFTEN, RIGHT BEFORE THE DOOR TO THE TRUSTEE SLAMS SHUT--

I'VE BEEN A CLIENT OF THIS BANK FOR OVER TWENTY YEARS. NOW ALL OF A SUDDEN YOU DON'T TRUST ME?

IT'S NOT THAT, NOT AT ALL... THOUGH THERE ***HAVE*** BEEN SOME... IRREGULARITIES.

SUCH AS?

"REQUESTS FOR REIMBURSEMENT OF ***LIVING EXPENSES***, FOOD AND THE LIKE--"

"SHE SLEEPS IN THE BIGGEST ROOM IN THE HOUSE, AND SHE HAS SPECIAL DIETARY NEEDS WE NEED TO ADDRESS, AND GETTING HER A COMPUTER, TABLET, CELLPHONE--"

"YES, BUT THERE ARE NO ***RECEIPTS*** FOR ANY OF THOSE THINGS."

BECAUSE IT ALL GOES INTO THE POT WITH THE MONEY FOR RUNNING THE HOUSEHOLD, FEEDING AND LOOKING AFTER EVERYONE--

SO YOU SAY, BUT--

SO I ***SAY?***

THE SITUATION IS THIS, LIONEL. A HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS IS, WELL, A RATHER LARGE CHUNK OF THE REMAINING FUNDS IN THE TRUST--

SHE'S DECIDED SHE WANTS TO GO TO COLLEGE--

YOU'D SAID EARLIER SHE DECLINED--

SHE CHANGED HER MIND. IS THAT A CRIME?

NO, NOT AT ALL. THAT BEING THE CASE, AND SINCE IT'S ESSENTIAL THAT WE KEEP TABS ON THE TRUST IN THE MONTHS PRIOR TO ISABELLE TAKING CUSTODY, ALL WE NEED IS FOR HER TO COME HERE *WITH* YOU TO CONFIRM WHAT THE MONEY IS TO BE USED FOR. THEN WE WILL IMMEDIATELY CUT A CHECK TO THE UNIVERSITY--

NO, IT HAS TO BE MADE OUT TO ME, I MADE THE INITIAL CONTACT WITH THE UNIVERSITY, AND THERE ARE THINGS I HAVE TO LOOK AFTER PERSONALLY--

I'M SORRY, BUT THERE'S NO OTHER WAY TO DO THIS.

WHAT IF WE MADE IT 110,000 AND SET ASIDE THE OTHER 10K FOR--

--A FINDER'S FEE? OR MAYBE CALL IT A SERVICE FEE? JUST PERSONAL, BETWEEN YOU AND ME.

DUE TO OUR POLICIES, I'M AFRAID I'M GOING TO HAVE TO STOP THE CONVERSATION NOW, LIONEL.

I'M JUST SAYING--

WHEN YOU ARE READY TO MAKE PAYMENT ON ISABELLE'S TUITION, BRING HER ALONG AND WE'LL GET THIS DONE.

GOOD DAY.

"I HAVE A CONFESSION TO MAKE, ISABELLE."

IS THIS WHAT YOU'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT SO QUIETLY ALL MORNING?

YES.

BECAUSE YOU DON'T OWE ME--

I DO.

I KEEP HAVING THESE *DREAMS* OF THE TIME BEFORE THE *GREAT DEATH*... AND I THINK--

"--I THINK I WAS NOT A VERY GOOD MAN."

33 VC

BLAMM

33 VC

IS *THAT* WHY YOU'VE BEEN ON THIS WHOLE "I'M NOT WORTHY OF YOU" KICK?

SHOULDN'T SOMEONE'S PAST MATTER?

ONLY IF IT HASN'T BEEN *ADDRESSED*, OR *FIXED*, OR *FORGIVEN*, OR... WHATEVER.

THE *PAST* IS WHAT PEOPLE USE TO *HURT* US, TO TELL US WE'RE *NOBODY* AND *NOTHING* AND NOT *WORTHY* OF LOVE.

WE'VE ALL DONE THINGS...SOMETIMES BAD THINGS, SOMETIMES *TERRIBLE* THINGS...TO SURVIVE. THINGS WE WISH WE COULD PULL BACK SO THEY NEVER HAPPENED, SO WE COULD BE WHOLE AND WORTHY OF LOVE AND *CLEAN* AGAIN.

BUT WE CAN'T. ALL WE CAN DO IS TRY TO GET PAST IT, AND DO BETTER.

WHOEVER YOU WERE IN THE PAST, WHATEVER YOU DID, I DON'T CARE. ALL THAT MATTERS TO ME IS WHO YOU *ARE*, AND WHO YOU ARE TO *ME*, RIGHT NOW.

MAYBE IT TOOK FORGETTING WHO YOU *WERE* FOR YOU TO REMEMBER WHO YOU *ARE*.

AND MAYBE THIS IS STUPID, AND MAYBE WE DON'T KNOW EACH OTHER WELL ENOUGH, AND MAYBE IT'S TOO SOON, BUT--

--WHOEVER YOU *WERE*, WHOEVER YOU *ARE*, WHOEVER YOU'RE *GOING* TO BE--

I LOVE YOU.

I LOVE YOU.

"YOU GOT HIM?"

YEAH...AND LOOKS LIKE HE'S GOT A FRIEND.

DON'T CARE. HE'S THE TARGET.

"SEND IN THE HAND."

WE SHOULD GO SOON, BUT I HATE TO LOSE THE VIEW.

SO BEAUTIFUL.

YOU KEEP SAYING THAT, BUT I DON'T SEE IT. I WISH I COULD SEE THE WORLD THE WAY YOU DO.

IT'S EASY.

ONCE YOU STOP SEEING THE WORLD THE WAY THEY ***WANT*** YOU TO SEE IT...AS SOMETHING ***DIRTY***, AS SOMETHING ***HOPELESS***...THE TRUTH COMES ON ITS OWN.

LIKE YOU SAID, YOU FORGET WHAT IT *WAS* TO SEE IT FOR WHAT IT *IS*.

IS THAT WHAT YOU DO, WHEN YOU SEE ME? YOU FORGET WHO I WAS?

"NO...WHEN I LOOK AT YOU, I REMEMBER WHO I *AM*. BECAUSE YOU MAKE ME THOSE THINGS."

TRY IT. LOOK OUT AT THE CITY, THEN CLOSE YOUR EYES. DON'T SEE WHAT THE TYRANTS *WANT* YOU TO SEE. THEN OPEN YOUR EYES, AND SEE ONLY WHAT IS.

OKAY FINE BUT I FEEL STUPID--

THAT'S WHERE IT ALWAYS BEGINS.

Variant Cover Comics

YOU'RE FASTER THAN YOU LOOK.
YEAH, EVERYBODY MAKES THAT MISTAKE. IT'S HOW THEY END UP DYING QUICK.
YOU'VE PISSED OFF THE WRONG PEOPLE.

THE COURT OF SHADOWS HAS DECREED YOU MUST DIE. UNDERSTAND, THIS IS NOTHING PERSONAL. BUT IT MUST BE DONE.

YOU'RE WELCOME TO TRY, DEMON-SPAWN.

HARDWARE - TOOL
YOU DON'T GET IT. I CAN'T BE BEATEN. I CAN'T BE WORN OUT. I CAN'T BE HARMED BY ANY OUTSIDE FORCE.
THE MOMENT YOU SAW ME, YOU WERE ALREADY DEAD.

DRAIN-OUT

DRAIN-OUT

HEY! WHERE ARE YOU GOING? YOU HAVE TO PAY FOR THAT!

YOU'RE FAST AND YOU'RE ***AGILE*** AND YOU ***HEAL*** GOOD...BUT LIKE ANY IMMUNE SYSTEM--

--YOU ***OVERWHELM*** THE SYSTEM WITH TOO MUCH AT ONCE, AND SOONER OR LATER--

--IT FAILS.

NOT SO TOUGH AFTER ALL...

GRAB HIS ARMS!

LET GO! LET--

HOLD HIM!

--GET OFF ME--

AAAHHGG!

THE TARGET WILL FIGURE OUT WE USED SECURITY CAMERAS TO ZERO HIS LOCATION. HE'LL BE MORE CAREFUL NOW, HARDER TO FIND.

ALMOST CERTAINLY. BUT THERE MAY BE ANOTHER WAY TO FIND HIM.

I THINK WE HAVE FOUND OUR BLURRY ONLOOKER.

TO GET *HIM*, ALL WE NEED TO DO IS FIND *HER*. PUT THIS IMAGE OUT.

TO WHO?

EVERYONE.

"YOU DARE TO COME TO ME WITHOUT MY MONEY, LIONEL?"

I NEED MORE TIME, SERGEY, AND I THOUGHT IF I CAME TO YOU DIRECTLY--

YOU THOUGHT WRONG. SO LET ME GIVE YOU--

A CHANCE?

NO. A CHOICE.

IF I KILL YOU, I GET NONE OF THE MONEY YOU OWE ME. IT IS... UNPRODUCTIVE. SO HERE IS THE CHOICE.

YOU WILL LEAVE HERE TODAY WITH ONE LESS LIMB THAN YOU CAME IN WITH. YOU WILL TELL ME WHICH.

NO, I--

YOU CAN SAY THERE WAS AN ACCIDENT, A TERRIBLE ACCIDENT--

PLEASE... PLEASE, DON'T DO THIS--

MY RECOMMENDATION WOULD BE TO CHOOSE YOUR NON-DOMINANT ARM. THAT WAY YOU WILL STILL BE ABLE TO WALK TO WHEREVER IT IS YOU NEED TO GO--

--TO GET MY GODDAMNED MONEY!

I BEG YOU, I--

WAIT...WHAT'S THAT...WHAT'S *SHE* DOING HERE?

YOU KNOW WHO THAT IS?

I...YES, I KNOW...

THEN YOU MAY JUST HAVE SAVED YOURSELF A LIMB--

KEEP AN EYE OUT

--AND SOMEONE VERY IMPORTANT A GREAT DEAL OF TROUBLE.

"IN NOMINE PATRIS, ET FILII, ET SPIRITUS SANCTI.

"AMEN."

CLOSED TODAY FOR CLEANING

I'M SORRY WE COULD NOT GIVE YOU A ***PROPER*** FUNERAL, WITH A ***PROPER*** AUDIENCE, MY OLD FRIEND, BUT ALAS I CANNOT IN ANY WAY CONNECT ***MYSELF*** TO YOUR PRIOR...***ACTIVITIES.***

SO I CONTENT MYSELF WITH THE NOTION THAT ALL THOSE WHO ***FELL*** BEFORE YOU ARE FILLING THE SEATS, HERE AT THE MOMENT OF YOUR TRANSLATION TO THE SPIRIT.

YES...I THINK THEY WOULD JUST ABOUT FILL THIS PLACE. SO PERHAPS THIS IS A MORE ***APPROPRIATE*** AUDIENCE.

I WOULD NOT HAVE THE ***MONEY***, THE ADVENTURES, THE EXCITEMENT, OR THE--

"--***TROPHIES*** YOU HELPED ME GATHER OVER THE YEARS TO DEFEAT THE BOREDOM OF MY CALLING."

BUT YOUR DEATH WAS NOT IN ***VAIN***. YOU SAID SOMETHING VERY ***WISE*** ABOUT OUR OPPONENT... A POSSIBLE VULNERABILITY I HAVE BEEN THINKING ABOUT EVER SINCE THAT AFTERNOON--

BISHOP LAROUX....

I SAID I WAS NOT TO BE ***DISTURBED***--

WE JUST GOT A CALL FROM SERGEY, HE SAYS HE HAS A ***LEAD*** ON THE WOMAN WE'VE SEEN WITH THE ***FREAK***. I FIGURED YOU'D WANT TO KNOW IMMEDIATELY.

I WOULD, AND DO, THANK YOU.

I'M AFRAID I MUST GO, OLD FRIEND. THIS IS WHERE WE SAY GOODBYE.

WHAT DO YOU WANT DONE WITH THE CRATE?

ON MY DESK IS THE ADDRESS OF A ***LANDFILL*** HE AND I USED TO DISPOSE OF OUR PRIOR ***TROPHIES***. IT WILL SUFFICE.

YES, BISHOP.

"HE'S SICK."

IS IT THE PLAGUE?

NOT A DOCTOR, BUT THE SYMPTOMS MATCH.

THEN WE'VE ALL BEEN EXPOSED.

IT'S A PLANETARY VIRUS, THERE'S NO WAY WE *WON'T* BE EXPOSED SOONER OR LATER.

OKAY, BUT WHY *HIM?*

WHY *NOT* HIM? THE *BIG DEATH* DOESN'T GO ALPHABETICALLY.

SO WHAT DO WE DO WITH HIM?

LEAST WE CAN DO IS GET HIM SOMEPLACE WHERE HE CAN DIE IN MORE COMFORT THAN HE'S GONNA HAVE OUT HERE.

THERE'S A HOSPITAL NOT FAR FROM HERE.

THAT'LL DO.

WE'RE GONNA GET YOU SOMEPLACE *SAFE*, UMBERTO. SOMEPLACE YOU CAN *REST.*

THIS ISN'T WHAT I WANT... NOT HOW I WANTED TO DIE...

IT NEVER IS--

...DON'T LEAVE ME...

--UMBERTO.

HUUUCCHHH--

IT'S ALL RIGHT, *U*, I'M HERE, I'M RIGHT HERE--

IT WAS JUST A DREAM.

A *DREAM*, YES, BUT PERHAPS NOT *JUST* A DREAM.

WITH EVERY PASSING DAY, I...*REMEMBER* MORE OF WHO AND *WHAT* I WAS BEFORE THE *DEATH* CAME. AS IF SOME PART OF ME IS *AWAKENING*.

BUT ISN'T THAT GOOD?

NO. I WISH ONLY FOR THAT PERSON, THAT *LIFE*, TO GO BACK TO SLEEP, AND LEAVE ME ALONE FOREVER.

I DON'T *CARE* WHO I WAS, I DON'T *CARE* ABOUT THE PAST, AND THERE'S NO *FUTURE* I CARE ABOUT UNLESS IT IS WITH YOU.

I CARE ONLY ABOUT *YOU*, AND *US*, AND THIS MOMENT.

I LOVE YOU.

I LOVE YOU.

STAY WITH ME?

ALWAYS...

ALWAYS...

"THIS IS THE GUY I WAS TELLING YOU ABOUT, BISHOP."

TELL ME WHAT YOU KNOW. TELL ME HOW YOU CAN *HELP*. BUT UNDERSTAND, IF THIS INFORMATION IS A *WASTE* OF MY *TIME*--

--IT WILL ALSO BE A *WASTE* OF YOUR *LIFE*.

DON'T WORRY, IT WON'T BE.

HER NAME IS *ISABELLE*, MY NIECE ON MY BROTHER'S SIDE. WHEN HE AND HIS WIFE *DIED* DURING THE BIG DEATH, SHE CAME TO LIVE WITH US.

AND IS SHE STILL LIVING WITH YOU?

...NOT EXACTLY.

"I GUESS YOU COULD SAY WE HAD A BIT OF A FALLING OUT."

SO HOW DOES THIS HELP ME TO USE *HER* TO FIND THE *FREAK*?

THERE'S SOMETHING SHE DOESN'T *KNOW* THAT WILL BRING HER OUT.

YOU GET *HER*, YOU GET *HIM*.

AND WHAT DO YOU WANT IN RETURN?

I HAVE DEBTS, SERGEY. WITH YOU, AND OTHER BOOKIES. I WANT THEM ERASED.

EASILY DONE.

AND ONE MORE THING.

PULLING HER IN WILL MEAN I HAVE TO GET ***PERSONALLY*** INVOLVED. FOR TAKING THAT RISK, I WANT ONE MILLION DOLLARS IN CRYPTO, DEPOSITED TO AN OVERSEAS ACCOUNT--

--AND FIVE PERCENT OF SERGEY'S CHECK CASHING BUSINESS.

YOU LITTLE--

NO, SERGEY, IT'S ALL RIGHT.

I FIGURE EVERY DAY THE FREAK IS ALLOWED TO ROB YOUR ***OFFICES*** AND KILL YOUR ***HIT MEN*** WITHOUT EVEN ***TRYING*** IS ***WORTH*** THE COST.

A FAIR POINT.

I AGREE TO YOUR TERMS. BUT THEY WILL REQUIRE ***RESULTS***...OR I WILL TAKE SERGEY OFF HIS ***LEASH*** AND I THINK THAT WILL NOT BE VERY GOOD FOR YOU.

HOW ARE YOU EVEN GOING TO ***GET*** TO HER IN THE FIRST PLACE, ***AND*** CONVINCE HER TO COME OUT WHERE WE CAN GRAB HER?

IN REVERSE ORDER...BY MAKING HER AN OFFER SHE CAN'T REFUSE. TO THE FORMER--

--HOW MANY BURNER ***CELL PHONES*** CAN YOU GET YOUR HANDS ON?

"I DON'T UNDERSTAND YOU SOMETIMES."

HAVING SEEN SO MUCH *UGLINESS* AND *PAIN* AND THE WORST OF THE WORLD, HOW CAN YOU STILL SEE SUCH--

BEAUTY?

YES.

I SEE *YOU*. ISN'T THAT ENOUGH?

YOU *KNOW* WHAT I'M ASKING.

YES.

I WONDER THE SAME ABOUT YOU...HOW SOMEONE WITH AS *BEAUTIFUL* A *SOUL* AS YOURS CAN LOOK OUT AT THE WORLD AND NOT SEE WHAT'S SO CLEARLY THERE.

TELL ME WHAT YOU SEE.

GLASS TOWERS RISING A MILE INTO THE SKY THAT FRACTURE THE DAYLIGHT INTO A THOUSAND COLORS, FRAGILE, TRANSCENDENT AND ETERNAL...

...VAST COPPER DOMES ATOP PALACES AND TEMPLES...SPIRES OF SILVER AND GOLD, COVERED IN A MYSTERIOUS AND LONG FORGOTTEN LANGUAGE.

I SEE BEAUTY. I SEE WONDER. I SEE JOY AND OPTIMISM AND REVELATION.

I SEE *BEAUTY.*

I SEE WHAT IS TRUE. I SEE--

--EVERYTHING.

TELL ME WHAT *YOU* SEE, ISABELLE. SO THAT WE CAN PERHAPS DISCOVER WHERE YOU WENT WRONG, AND WHY THE WORLD YOU SEE IS NOT THE TRUTH OF THE WORLD I SEE.

I SEE BRUTALITY. I SEE MISERY, AND CRUELTY, AND VIOLENCE, AND UGLINESS.

I SEE THESE TV EVANGELISTS SAYING HUMANS ARE THE BEST THING GOD EVER MADE. AND WE'RE NOT.

WE'RE BEST AT JUST ONE THING.

KILLING EACH OTHER AND EVERYTHING AROUND US THAT GETS IN THE WAY OF WHAT WE WANT.

WHAT DO I SEE?

PAIN. THAT'S ALL.

PAIN.

WOULD YOU LIKE ME TO TELL YOU MY THEORY ABOUT THE *BIG DEATH?*

SURE.

I THINK SOMETHING *HAPPENED* TO THE WORLD A LONG TIME AGO TO MAKE PEOPLE FORGET WHO THEY *ARE*, AND WHAT IT IS TO BE *ALIVE.*

SOMETHING THAT MAKES IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR THEM TO SEE THE WORLD AS IT IS. FULL OF *MYSTERY, WONDER* AND *BEAUTY.*

"SO SOMEONE, SOMEWHERE, DECIDED TO PUSH THE *RESET* BUTTON."

"THE VIRUS WAS *HARD*, AND IT *WOUNDED* THE ENTIRE HUMAN RACE. BECAUSE SOMETIMES PAIN IS NECESSARY TO *WAKE US UP* FROM OURSELVES.

"BUT WHAT CAME OUT OF IT?

"REBORNS WITH POWERS THAT BROUGHT *MAGIC* BACK INTO THE WORLD.

"IT WAS A MOMENT OF TRANSITION THAT SAID *WE ARE MORE THAN WE THINK WE ARE, MORE THAN WE HAVE BEEN TAUGHT WE ARE.*

"THAT AS A *SPECIES* WE ARE *BETTER* THAN WE *THINK*, AND *NOBLER* THAN WE *KNOW.*

"THAT THERE IS STILL *BEAUTY* IN THE WORLD, AND THAT THERE ARE STILL *GEMSTONES* AMID THE *GRAVEL.*"

I THINK THE BIG DEATH HAPPENED BECAUSE THE HUMAN RACE HAD BECOME TOXIC, AND SELF-DESTRUCTIVE, AND CANCEROUS, AND ALL THAT DARKNESS HAD TO BE CUT OUT OF US, SO WE COULD REDISCOVER ***WONDER.***

SO WE COULD REMEMBER WHO WE REALLY ***ARE***, AND WHAT THE WORLD ***LOOKS*** LIKE.

TRY AGAIN, ISABELLE. PUSH AWAY ALL THE ***PAIN*** YOU HAVE ENDURED, WHAT OTHERS ***WANT*** YOU TO SEE, AND SEE WHAT I SEE.

TRY. FOR ME. ONE MORE TIME.

I DON'T SEE IT...I ***CAN'T*** SEE IT--

I'M SORRY...I'M SORRY--

IT'S ALL RIGHT...I LOVE YOU.

I LOVE YOU TOO.

ABOUT TIME YOU SHOWED UP.

WHY? WHAT HAPPENED?

A TRUCK CAME THROUGH THE NEIGHBORHOOD GIVING AWAY CELL PHONES. EXCEPT THEY DON'T WORK. BECAUSE THEY'RE NOT FOR US. THEY'RE FOR *YOU.*

IT'S FROM MY UNCLE--

ISABELLE,
I NEED TO TALK TO YOU.
USE YOUR BIRTHDATE
TO UNLOCK.
UNCLE LIONEL

THE ONE WHO THREW YOU OUT?

YES.

ARE YOU GOING TO CALL HIM?

NO.

SURE SEEMS LIKE IT MUST BE IMPORTANT, THOUGH. I MEAN, THERE WERE *DOZENS* OF THESE PHONES--

DON'T CARE.

IF HE'S TRYING THIS HARD TO FIND YOU, PERHAPS THERE'S A *REASON*, SOMETHING YOU SHOULD *KNOW.*

AFTER THE WAY HE TREATED ME, THERE'S NOTHING HE CAN SAY THAT I WANT TO HEAR.

I AGREE. AND YET--

--I FEEL THE *WOUND* BETWEEN THE TWO OF YOU, THE *BURDEN* YOU CARRY OF THINGS LEFT UNSAID BETWEEN YOU. THAT WOUND WILL NEVER *HEAL* UNTIL YOU CAN TELL HIM THOSE THINGS.

SO YOU'RE SAYING I SHOULD MAKE THE CALL?

NO. I'M SAYING ONLY THAT YOU SHOULD *CONSIDER* IT.

I'LL DO IT FOR *YOU*, NOT FOR HIM.

Passcode

I UNDERSTAND.

UNLOCKED

THERE SHE IS.

TELL HER JUST WHAT WE DISCUSSED, NO MORE.

DON'T WORRY, I'VE GOT THIS.

BRRRRINNNNG

HEY, IZZY.

WHAT DO YOU WANT, LIONEL?

JUST TO TALK...TO TELL YOU SOMETHING YOU NEED TO KNOW.

I'VE BEEN THINKING A LOT ABOUT THINGS SINCE YOU LEFT, AND--

--THERE'S SOMETHING I'VE BEEN HIDING FROM YOU, IZZY, AND I'M ASHAMED OF MYSELF, AND I WANT TO FIX IT.

YOUR PARENTS PUT ALMOST ***HALF A MILLION DOLLARS*** IN A TRUST FOR YOUR CARE UNTIL YOU WERE READY TO ACCESS IT.

BUT AFTER THEY ***DIED*** YOU WERE SO FAR OUT OF ***CONTROL*** THAT I WAS WORRIED THAT YOU WOULD THROW IT AWAY.

I WAS ONLY TRYING TO ***PROTECT*** YOU, BUT I SEE NOW THAT I ONLY SUCCEEDED IN DRIVING YOU ***AWAY.***

SO I WANT TO ***FIX*** THIS. ***ATONE*** FOR MY ***MISTAKE.***

WHY SHOULD I TRUST YOU?

YOU WON'T HAVE TO.

MEET ME AT TEN TOMORROW IN THE COFFEE SHOP BY YOUR FATHER'S BANK. I'LL BRING THE PAPERWORK NEEDED TO TRANSFER THE MONEY. THEN WE'LL WALK NEXT DOOR, AND GET IT DONE.

ONE HOUR. SEE YOU THEN.

CLICK

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

I THINK YOU SHOULD GO.

AND WHAT IF HE'S LYING, OR UP TO SOMETHING?

THEN THIS IS THE LAST TIME YOU EVER NEED TO SEE HIM.

THIS ISN'T *ABOUT* HIM. IT'S ABOUT *YOU* HAVING A CHANCE TO TELL HIM ALL THE THINGS YOU NEED TO SAY. IF HE HAS SINCERELY CHANGED, THEN YOU HAVE THE POWER TO DECIDE WHAT TO DO NEXT.

AND IF HE ABUSES THIS OPPORTUNITY, THEN HAVING SPOKEN YOUR PEACE YOU CAN WALK AWAY WITH YOUR HEAD HIGH, THE DOOR, AND THE WOUND, CLOSED AT LAST.

3ELIEV3

WILL YOU COME WITH ME?

OF COURSE.

"YOU REALLY THINK HE'LL COME?"

AFTER EVEN THE LITTLE I HAVE SEEN AND HEARD...YES, SERGEY. EVEN IF SHE TOLD HIM TO STAY BACK, I THINK HE WOULD FOLLOW HER.

AND THEN WHAT?

I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT WHAT *THE HAND* SAID BEFORE HE DIED *FIGHTING* THIS FREAK--

OUR TARGET IS A *TOUGH* ONE. FROM WHAT I HEAR, HE CAN HEAL IN A MATTER OF *SECONDS* FROM NEARLY ANY KIND OF INJURY.

YOU CAN'T *HEAL* WHAT'S NOT *THERE*. HE'S NOT ABOUT TO GROW A NEW *HEAD*. ONCE I TEAR *THAT* OFF, WE'RE GOOD.

"I BELIEVE HE WAS *CORRECT* IN HIS ASSESSMENT--"

--BUT HE WAS *KILLED* BEFORE HE COULD *PROVE* THE POINT.

I WILL SET UP A *CROSSFIRE* OF THE BEST GUNMEN I KNOW...ARTISTS, EVERY ONE OF THEM. THEY'LL FIRE AND FIRE AND KEEP FIRING AT HIS HEAD UNTIL THERE'S NOTHING LEFT BUT JELLY.

IF THERE'S NO BRAIN TISSUE TO COORDINATE THE HEALING PROCESS, HIS ABILITY TO REGENERATE BECOMES MOOT.

OKAY, WHATEVER, THERE'S STILL ONE MORE THING I NEED.

IZZY CAN USUALLY TELL WHEN I'M *LYING* TO HER, SO WHAT I TOLD HER ABOUT THE TRUST WAS TRUE--

--WELL, *MOSTLY.*

I LEFT *SOME* STUFF OUT, BUT THE *CORE* OF IT IS TRUE.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOUR *PLANS* ARE FOR HER TOMORROW, AND I DON'T *WANT* TO KNOW. BUT IF SHE'S STILL *AROUND* AFTERWARD, SHE CAN GET THAT MONEY WITHOUT ANYTHING TO DO WITH *ME.*

WHICH MEANS I'LL BE OUT NEARLY SOOK.

SO IF WE COULD *ADD* THAT TO THE MILLION YOU *ALREADY* OWE ME, THAT WOULD BE *GREAT.*

I DON'T THINK THAT WILL BE MUCH OF A PROBLEM, DO YOU, SERGEY?

LET ME SEE WHAT I CAN DO.

NO...NONONO-
NONONO--

AAAAGGHHH!

I HATE AMATEURS.

"I TRY NOT TO ASK FOR MUCH--"

--BUT JUST THIS ONCE, GOD, I WANT A FAVOR.

LET ME SEE THE WORLD THE WAY U SEES IT.

JUST ONCE. JUST FOR A *MINUTE.*

PLEASE... PLEASE...

...PLEASE.

IT'S NEARLY TIME. WE CAN WALK TO THE BANK TO MEET YOUR UNCLE FROM HERE.

MMM, HMM.

AN APPROPRIATE PLACE TO WAIT, BECAUSE FOR ME THE *SEA* HAS ALWAYS BEEN A PLACE OF *HEALING* POWER.

I KNOW YOU ARE CONCERNED, ISABELLE, BUT I WILL PROTECT YOU.

IT'S NOT THAT, U, IT'S--

I KEEP TRYING TO SEE THE WORLD THE WAY YOU DO, BUT NOTHING WORKS. AND IT MAKES ME WONDER IF THAT OTHER VERSION REALLY EXISTS.

I'VE BEEN WITH OTHERS, *SO* MANY OTHERS, AND SO MANY OF THEM WERE DREAMERS, OR FAST TALKERS, AND I BOUGHT INTO WHAT THEY WERE SELLING BECAUSE I HAD *FEELINGS* FOR THEM...BUT IN THE END, I GOT DISAPPOINTED. EVERY TIME.

I'M AFRAID IT WILL BE THAT WAY FOR US...THAT MAYBE THIS OTHER REALITY ISN'T THERE, OR THAT I CAN'T GET TO IT, THAT I'LL NEVER GET TO IT.

AND I DON'T WANT THAT TO HAPPEN, BECAUSE WHAT WE HAVE IS REAL, AND I DON'T WANT ANYTHING ON THE OUTSIDE TO EVER MAKE IT FEEL *NOT* REAL.

IT WON'T. THE WORLD I SEE IS REAL. YOU WILL GET THERE.

WE WILL GET THERE, *TOGETHER.*

"ARE WE ALL SET, SERGEY?"

AS YOU INSTRUCTED, I HAVE SET UP A KILL-ZONE IN FRONT OF THE BANK, WITH MARKSMEN ON EVERY ROOF AND WINDOW OVERLOOKING THE AREA. OTHER MEN IN CARS STATIONED NEARBY WILL CUT OFF ACCESS TO THE AREA UNTIL WE'RE DONE.

GOOD.

IT MAKES ME NERVOUS, THOUGH. THERE ARE CAMERAS IN THE AREA--

THEY WILL SEE NOTHING--

CIVILIANS--

--WHO WILL BE KEPT OUT OF THE LINE OF FIRE, AND WELL COMPENSATED.

AND IF THE POLICE SHOW UP?

WE *OWN* THE POLICE. AND THE COURTS. AND THE PRESS. IT IS TIME WE SENT A MESSAGE BIG ENOUGH TO BE SEEN FROM SPACE: THAT WE ARE NOT TO BE FUCKED WITH, BY ANYONE.

THERE'S ONLY ONE LAST ITEM.

WHEN THE *SNIPERS* HAVE SHOT HIS BRAIN TO MUSH, I WANT TO BE THE ONE TO DELIVER THE FINAL BLOW. LET HIM KNOW IT WAS *ME* WHO BEAT HIM, WHO *KILLED* HIM--

--AND THAT THERE ARE SOME PEOPLE IN THIS WORLD WHO YOU SIMPLY DO NOT FUCK WITH.

"ALMOST THERE."

I WAS THINKING...YOU DON'T HAVE TO GO INTO THE BANK WITH ME--

WHERE YOU GO, MY QUEEN, I GO.

OH, SO I'M A *QUEEN* NOW, AM I?

YOU WERE ***ALWAYS*** A QUEEN, MY LADY. YOU WERE THE ONLY ONE WHO DIDN'T ***KNOW*** THAT.

"TARGETS ON APPROACH."

ALL STATIONS, CHECK IN.

POST ONE, GO. POST TWO, GO. POST THREE, GO. POST FOUR, GO.

POST FIVE, GO.

JUST SAY THE WORD.

NERVOUS?

WITH YOU, NO, I--

Closed for water repairs.

IT'S LOCKED, IT'S--

...NO...

BLAM

BLAM

BLAM

BLAM

POK POK POK

STAY HERE--

NO, DON'T GO, I HAVE A BAD--

I WILL ALWAYS RETURN TO YOU.

THE HEAD! GO FOR THE HEAD!

WHAT THE HELL DO YOU THINK I'M *DOING* HERE? HE'S *FAST* GODDAMNIT!

"HE'S COMING AFTER ME NEXT!"

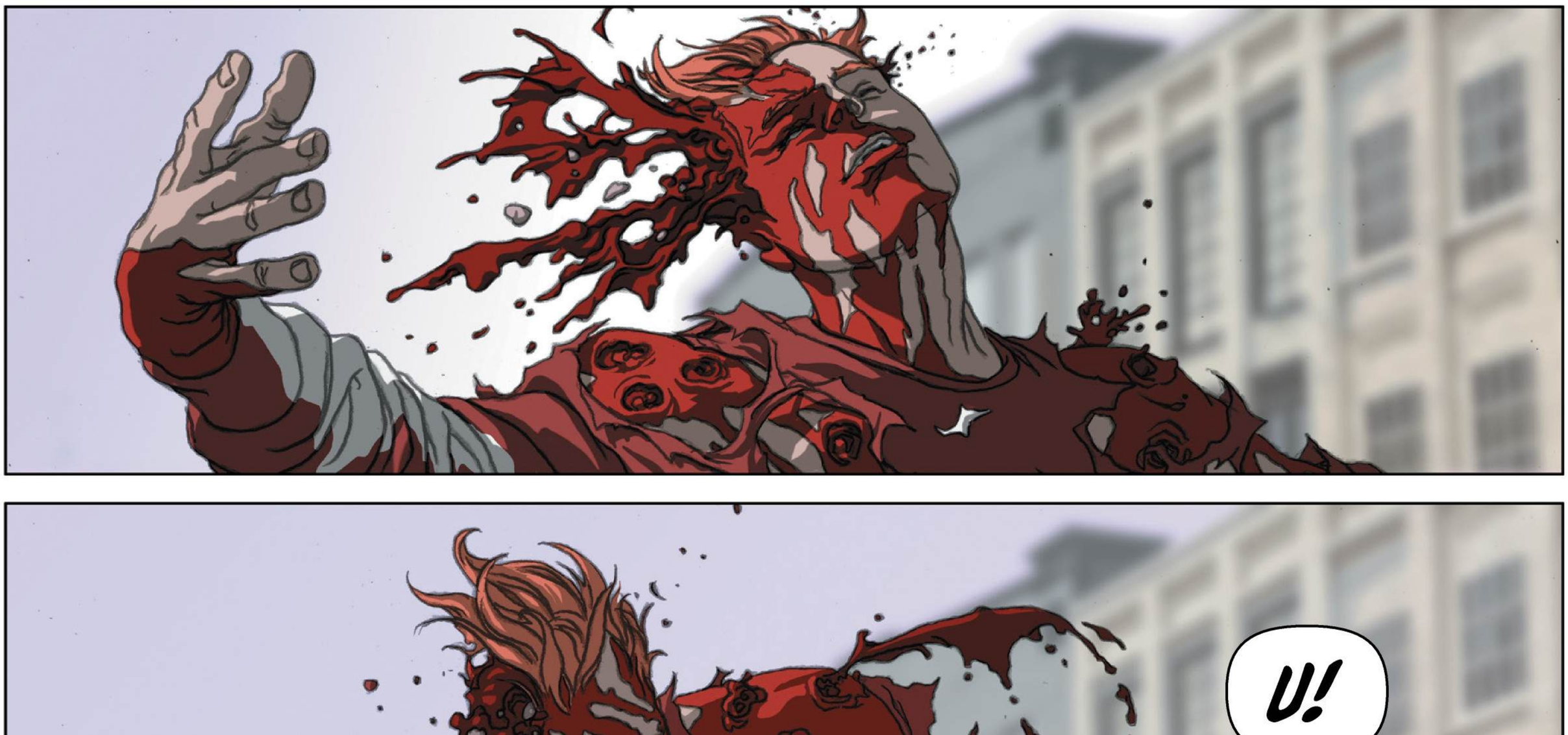
PUT HIM BACK IN THE KILLING ZONE!

ISABELLE!

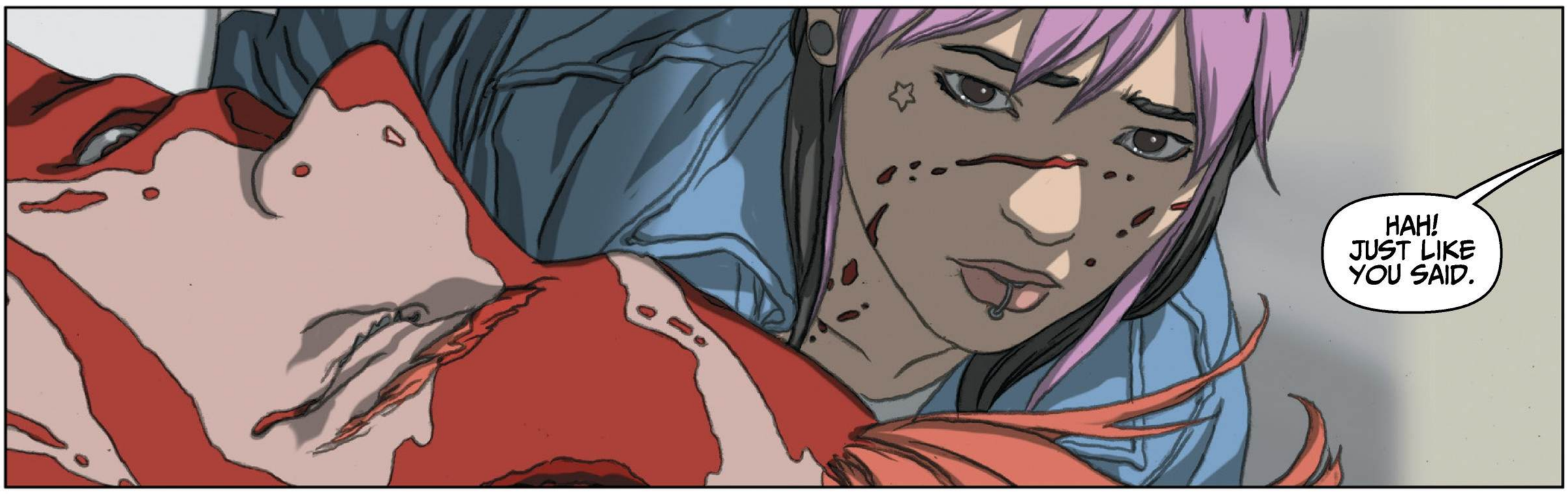
NNNNGHHH!

U--

DO NOT MOVE...LOOK ONLY AT ME...



U!


HAH!
JUST LIKE
YOU SAID.

TAKE OUT THE
BRAIN, THE REST
GOES WITH IT.
STAY
AWAY FROM
HIM!

MIGHT HAVE SOME *FUN* WITH *YOU* LATER. BUT *FIRST*--

--WE'RE GOING TO BLOW YOUR *FUCKING* HEAD OUT, THEN *CUT* IT OFF TO MAKE *SURE* YOU DON'T PULL YOURSELF TOGETHER AGAIN. WHAT DO YOU THINK OF *THAT*, ASSHOLE?

...HUCCCH...

WHAT'S THAT? DIDN'T HEAR WHAT YOU SAID. TOO MUCH *BLOOD* IN YOUR MOUTH.

...I... SSSSAIDD... YOuuuuuu--

I WHAT?

...DSSHIDDDN'T... DIDN'T CHECK--

...MY... POCKETS...

BLAMM!

DON'T EVEN BOTHER TRYING THAT ON ME.

THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY THIS ENDS. I FINISH YOU OFF AND SHE WALKS AWAY--

--OR I FINISH *HER* OFF AND I DO THE SAME TO YOU *ANYWAY.*

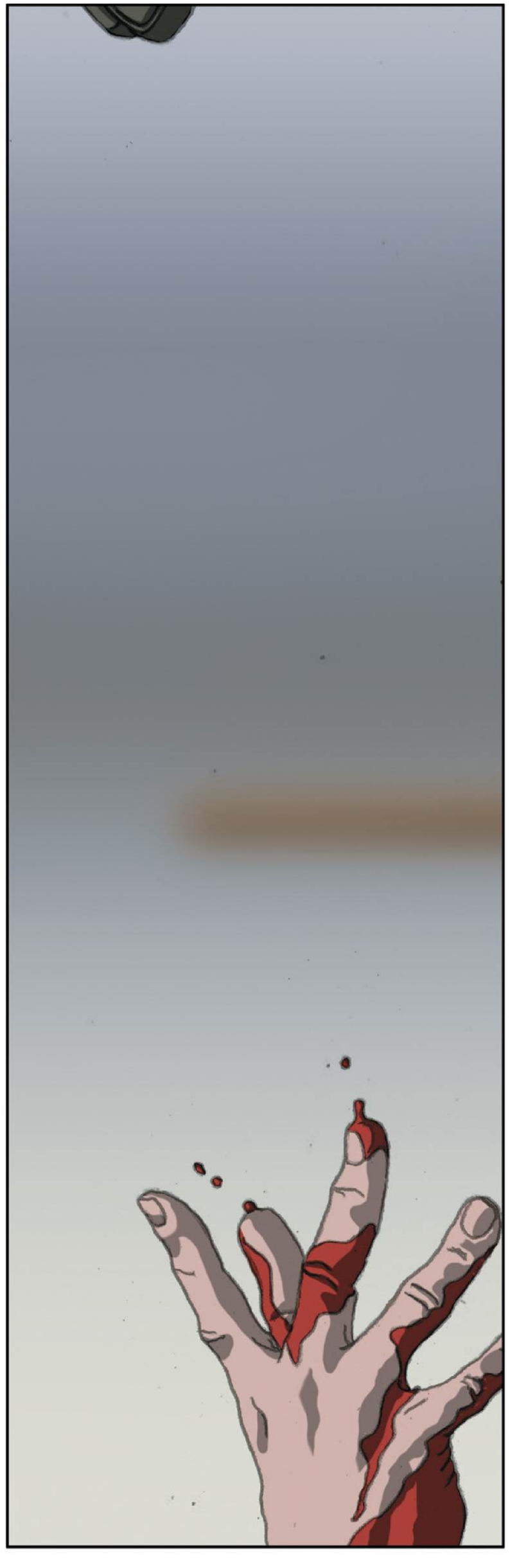
DON'T LISTEN TO HIM, U.

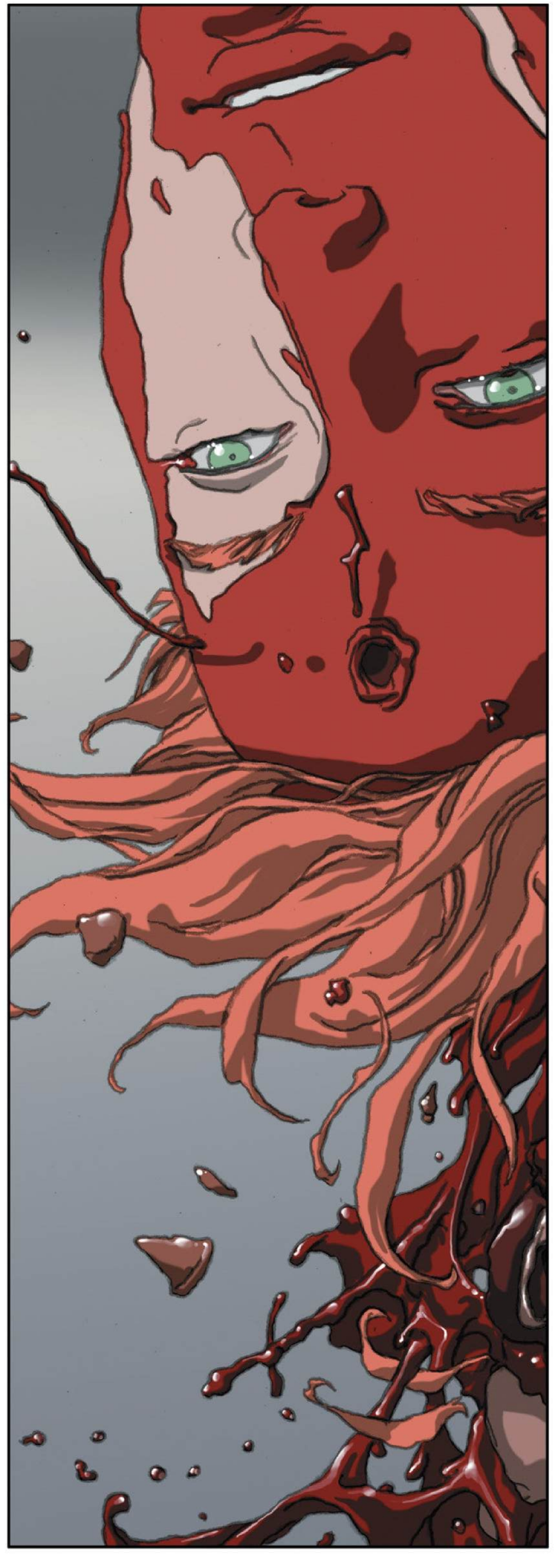
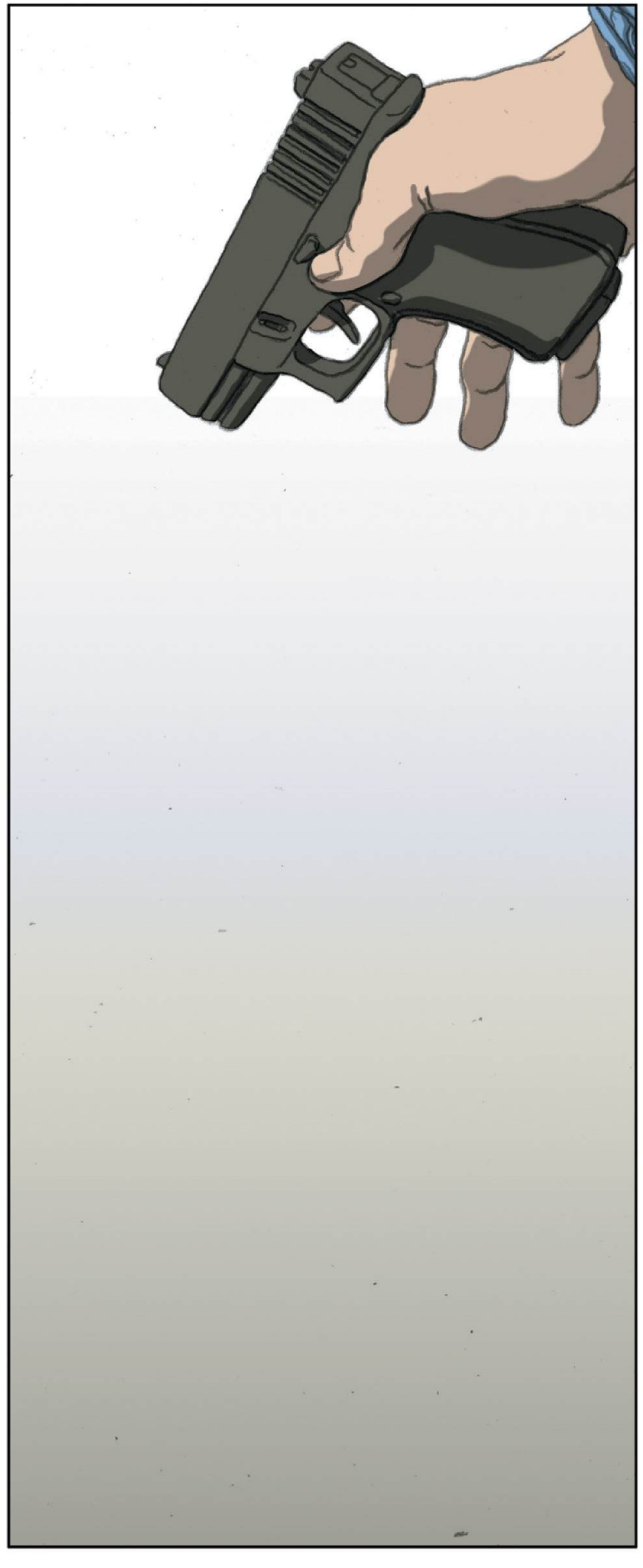
HE'LL NEVER LET ME LEAVE HERE ALIVE! HE WON'T WANT ANY WITNESSES! GO WHILE YOU CAN STILL HEAL! PLEASE--

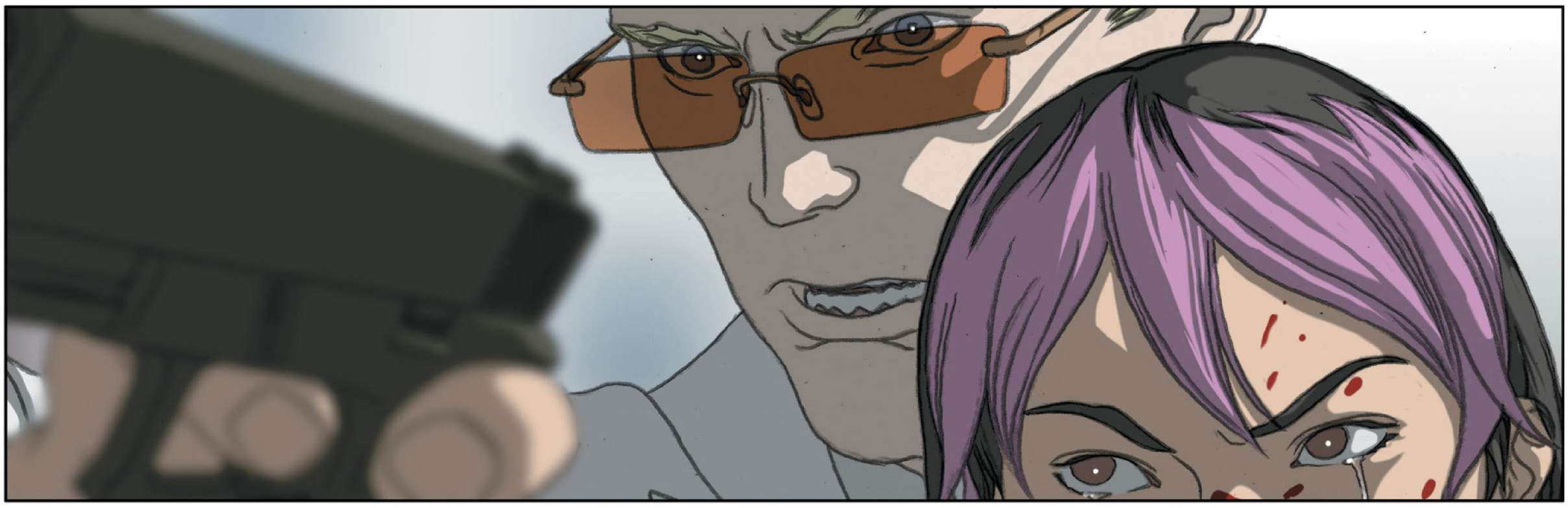
ISSSSABELLE...

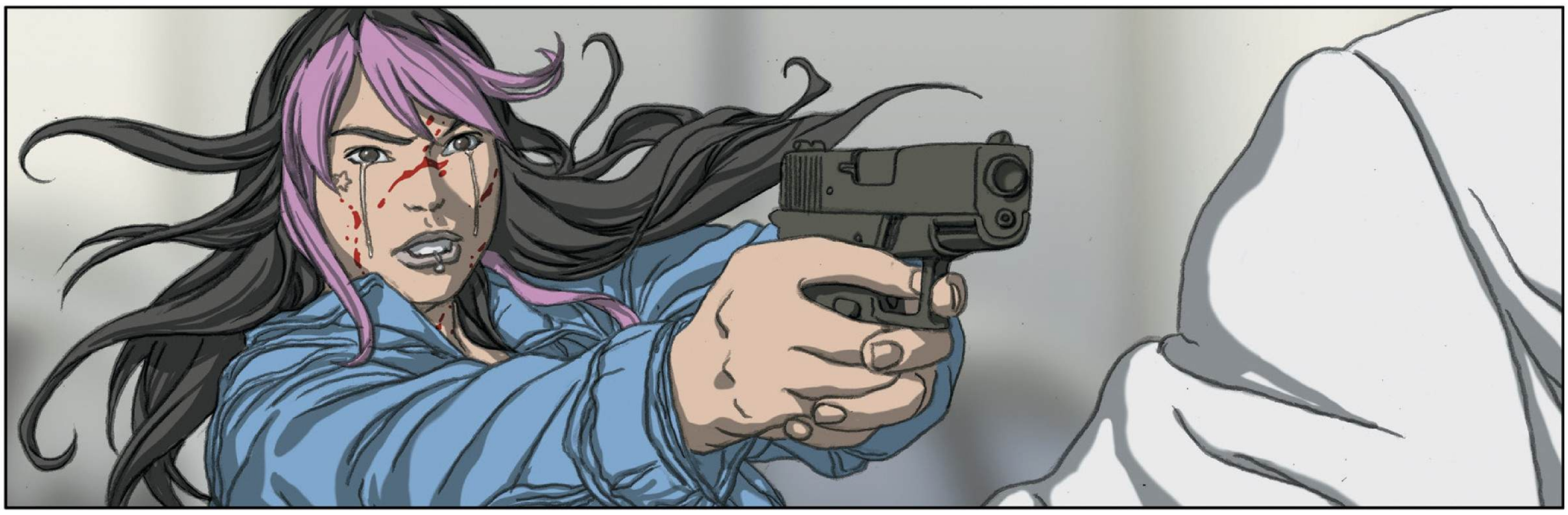
...I LOOOOVEEE... YOU...

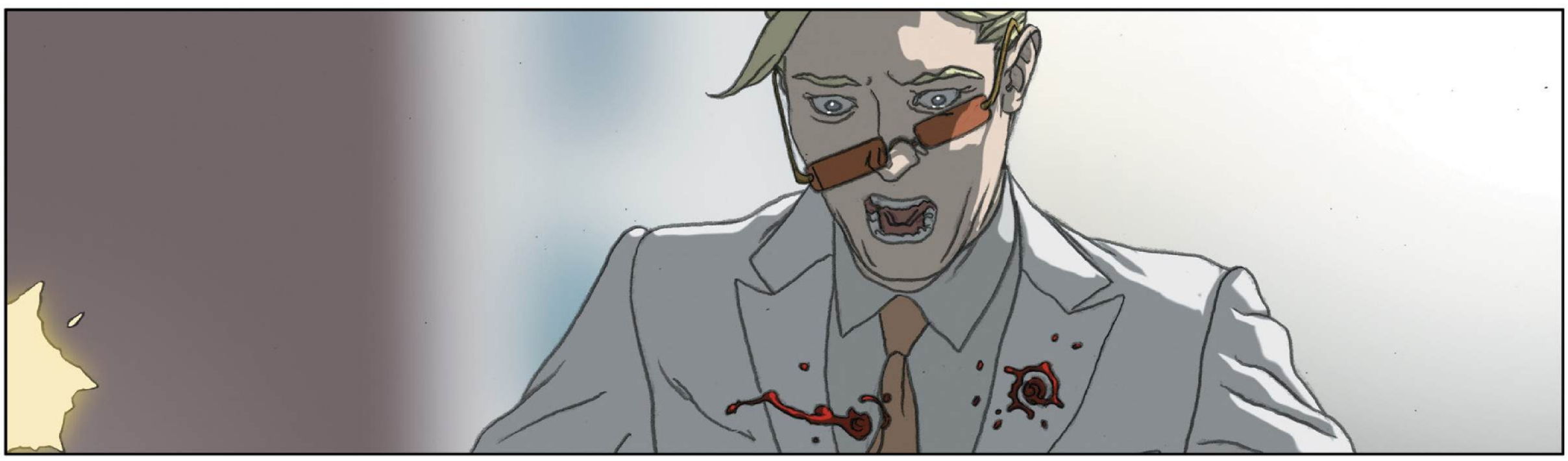
...LOVE...
YOU...

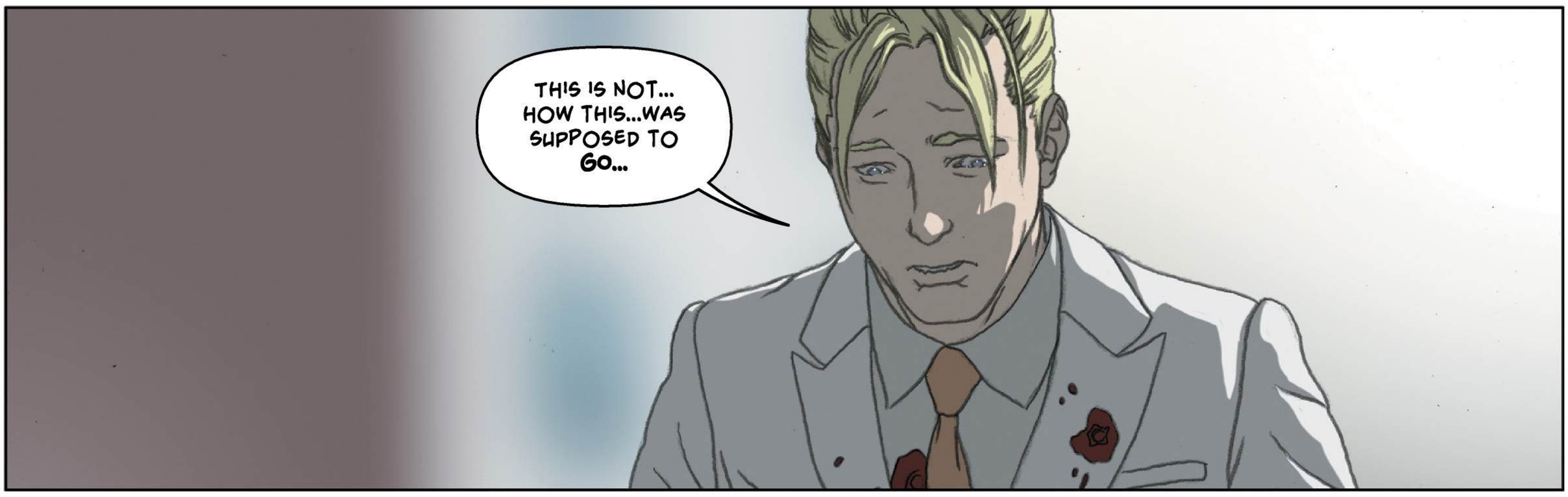


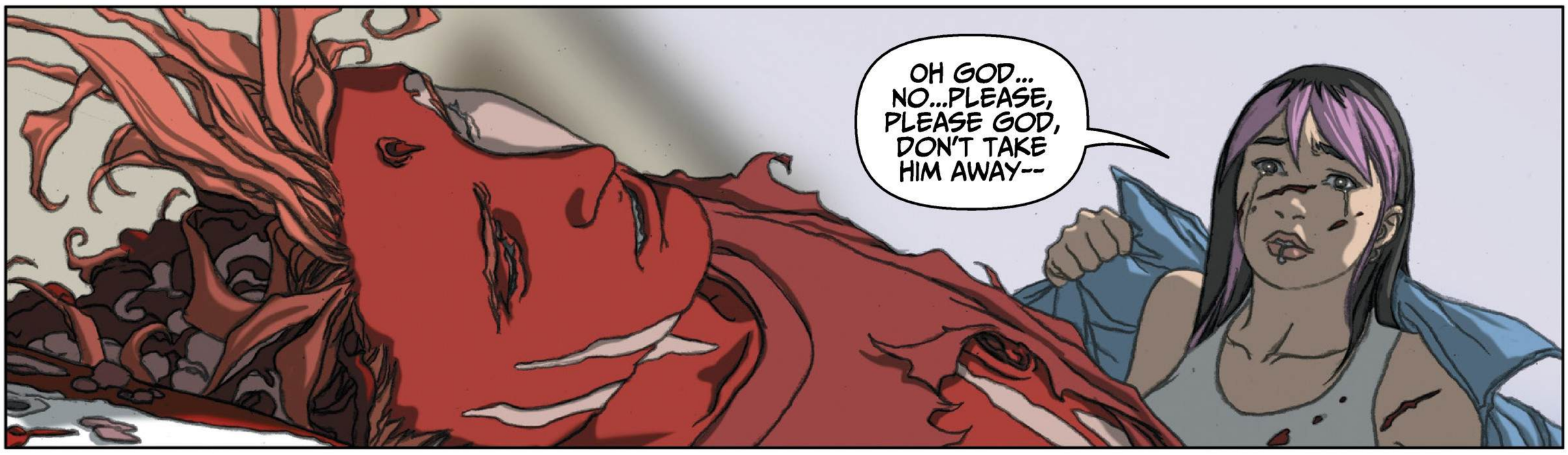



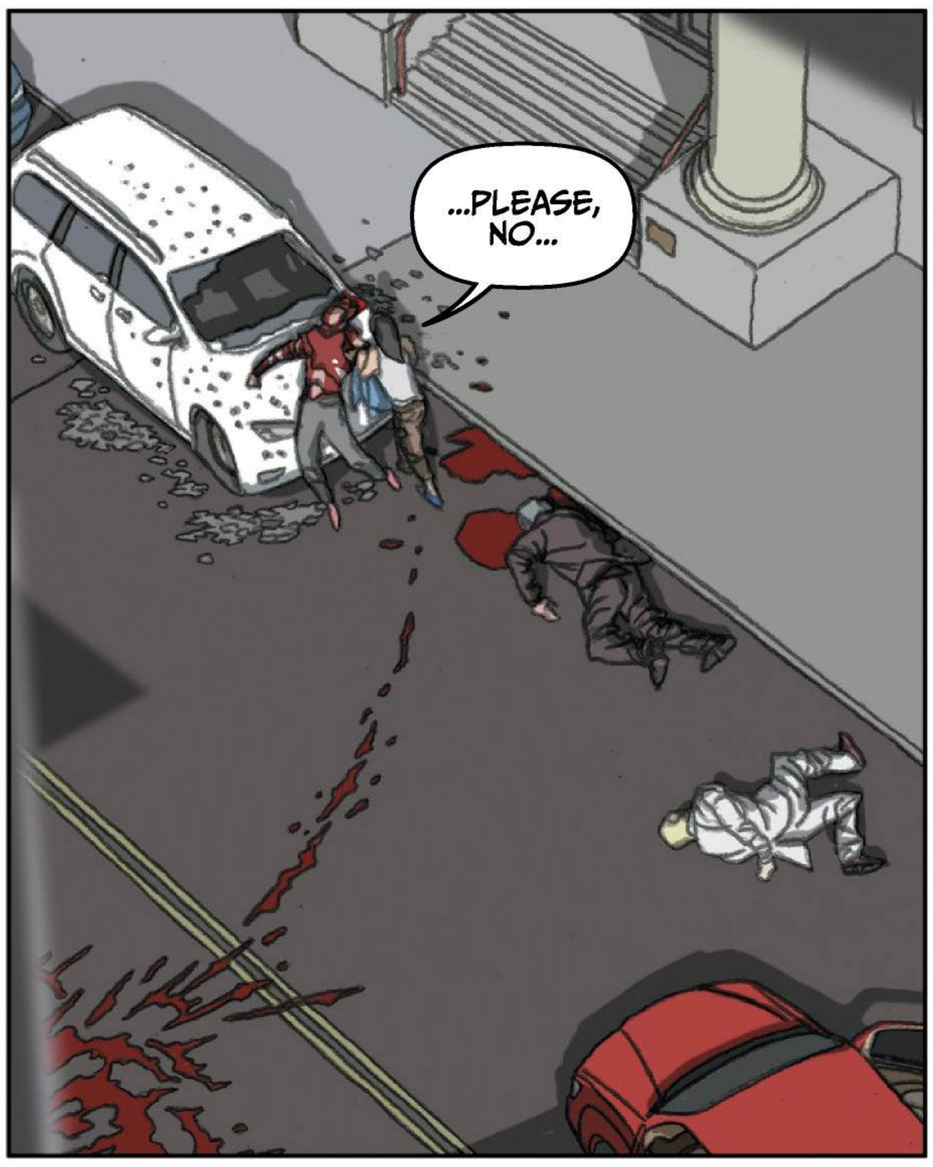




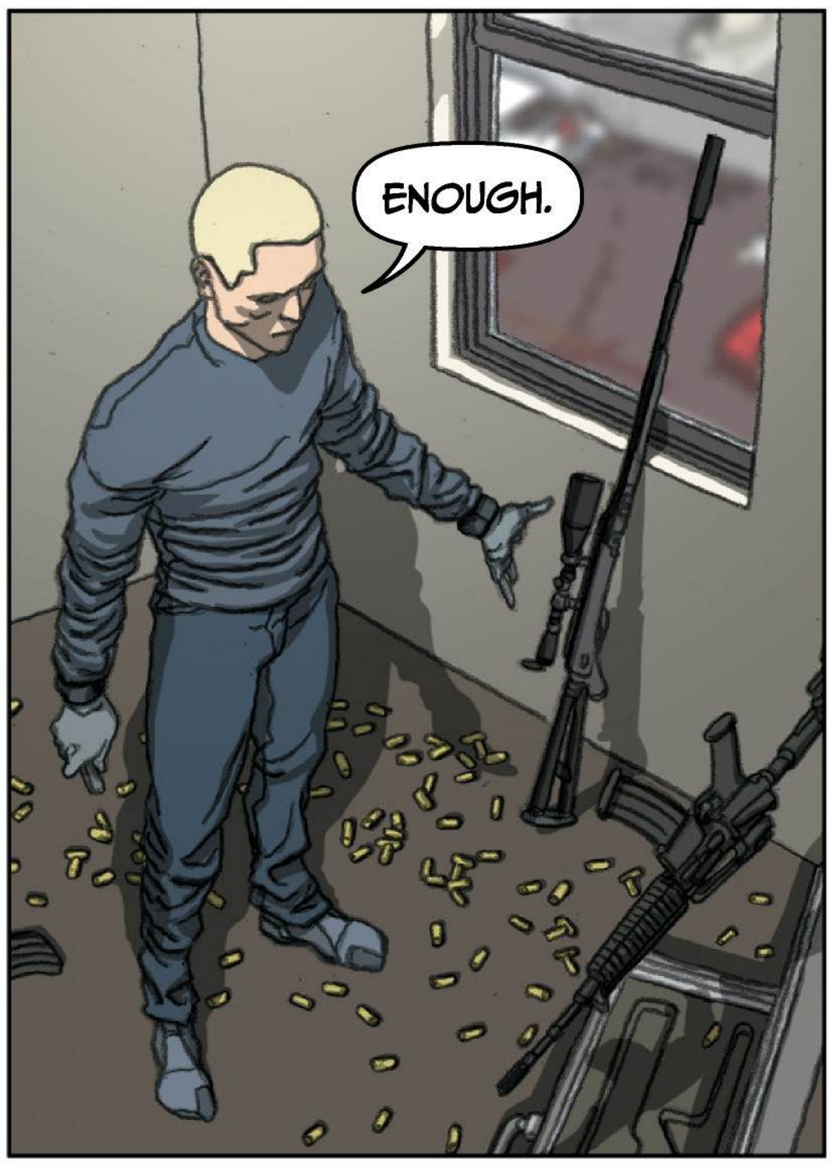



THIS IS NOT... HOW THIS...WAS SUPPOSED TO GO...

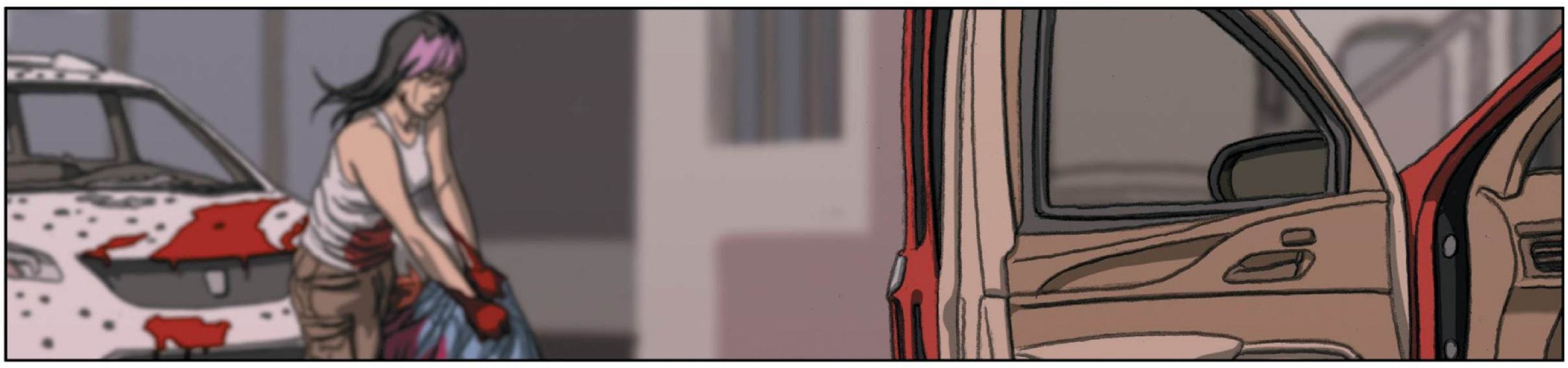

OH GOD... NO...PLEASE, PLEASE GOD, DON'T TAKE HIM AWAY--


...PLEASE, NO...

NO.


ENOUGH.

...FOR ME THE SEA HAS ALWAYS BEEN A PLACE OF HEALING POWER.



PLEASE HEAL HIM...HE'S THE ONLY ONE WHO EVER TRULY LOVED ME...THE ONLY ONE I EVER TRULY LOVED...

PLEASE, PLEASE, PLEASE HEAL HIM...

I KNOW I SHOULD GO...I DON'T WANT TO, BUT I KNOW I SHOULD, THAT YOU'D *WANT* ME TO GO.

BUT I HAVE TO TELL YOU SOMETHING FIRST.

WHEN I FIRST MET YOU, YOU WERE BEAUTIFUL, AND FUNNY, AND I THOUGHT YOU WERE CRAZY...BUT MOSTLY, YOU *SCARED* ME.

BECAUSE YOU WERE *FREE.* AND I WASN'T. AND I DIDN'T REALLY UNDERSTAND THAT UNTIL I MET YOU. I DIDN'T *SEE, COULDN'T* SEE, WHAT YOU SAW, BECAUSE I WAS *AFRAID* TO SEE IT.

BUT HERE'S A SECRET.

I'M NOT AFRAID ANYMORE.

AND I SEE IT TOO.

"SOMEBODY SAID THAT THE MORE TIME YOU SPEND IN THE COMPANY OF LIONS, THE LESS IMPROBABLE BECOMES THE IDEA OF *ROARING.*"

"AND I AM READY TO *ROAR*, BECAUSE OF YOU. BECAUSE OF WHAT YOU SHOWED ME. BECAUSE OF WHAT WE *HAD*.

"BECAUSE THERE IS STILL BEAUTY IN THE WORLD.

"I WILL TELL THEM.

"I WILL *SHOW* THEM.

"JUST LIKE YOU SHOWED ME."

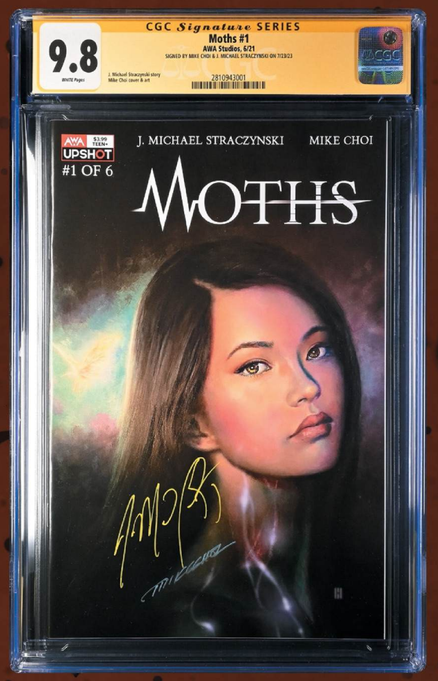
"AND I WILL ALWAYS, *ALWAYS*, WAIT FOR YOU.

"I LOVE YOU."

THE END

DREAM TEAM

When I look at this, a book signed by myself and J. Michael Straczynski that we'd both created together, it sometimes feels like a dream. The kind of dream where you just happen to be doing ordinary things, but you also happen to be married to a famous singer or your high school crush or Godzilla as if that's not the crazy part.



I didn't really discover comic books until I was in college at The University of Texas in Austin in the late 90's. Sure, I *looked* at a lot of comics in the early 90's as a teenager. But I didn't start really reading them past the cool pictures until stores like Funny Papers and Austin Books and Comics would tolerate me sitting on their floor, reading trade paperback after trade paperback for hours. And then when I got a job as a consultant after graduating and would travel to client sites across the country and was actually making money, I would go to the airport every Monday with a practically empty suitcase and come back on Friday with it full of comics from stores in Wisconsin, New York, and Colorado. I loved comic books and could not stop reading them. I still maintain to this day that I only started drawing just so I could have a job in comics, because I loved reading them so much.

Top Cow Productions was a publisher based in Los Angeles, started by one of the original Image founders, Marc Silvestri. Their books were famous for being quintessential "90's style" comics, with gorgeous art being front and center, and story acting as the vehicle to mainline the visuals. While I absolutely loved *The Darkness* and *Ascension* and *Aphrodite IX* and their flagship book, *Witchblade*, the Top Cow book that had me hooked was a book called *Rising Stars*. With Keu Cha drawing the first issue, it *looked* like a typically beautiful "90's style" comic with gorgeous superheroes doing gorgeously superhero things, but the story was different. It felt different. It was all about a question that the story was asking from the very first page, while bringing in deeply interesting characters and complex drama to answer that question. It was one of the first books where I found myself immediately rereading every issue as soon as I'd finished it. But it wasn't to look at the amazing art. It was to feel that feeling again, be it suspense, awe, anticipation, or catharsis, all just from the story itself.

Then I discovered another Top Cow book called *Midnight Nation*. Drawn by Gary Frank, the book featured the first of countless comic book characters I would fall in love with. Laurel was strong, vulnerable, noble, and funny. And while of course she was beautifully drawn and impeccably acted by Gary, it was the story of Laurel that made me fall in love with her on her journey with David over the course of the 12-issue run of *Midnight Nation*. It was the first time I'd ever read a page in a comic and thought, "I *have* to own the original art of this page," which I was eventually lucky enough to track down and buy.

It was also *Midnight Nation* that convinced me that I had to pursue a career in comic books. It didn't matter what the job was, as long as it was in comic books. Where else to start looking but at Top Cow? I would be lucky enough to land an unpaid internship in their marketing department two months later. Two years after that, I was exponentially luckier to learn how to draw comics there. And although I never had the pleasure of meeting the writer who had penned both *Rising Stars* and *Midnight Nation* during my tenure at Top Cow just to thank him for literally changing my life, I often would take a step back and really savor how cool it was to have a job at the place that published those two books.

And now in this universe and in this reality, there are two more books written by the same writer: J. Michael Straczynski. And for some reason in this particular dream, I'm not only a professional comic book artist of all things, I'm also the artist of those two books, *Moths* and now *U & I*. At this very moment, I happen to find myself in another airport, this time back in my college town of Austin. But instead of a client site in Greeley, I'm on my way to Singapore for a comic convention that they're inexplicably paying me to go to, writing an afterword for the *U & I* trade paperback, and still wanting to thank Joe for changing my life.

And if you just so happen to be reading this on the floor of some comic store...

I hope you keep dreaming a little longer.

Say hello to Godzilla for me.

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